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**The Problems of  
Integrating  
Annexed Lorraine  
into France,  
1918-1925**

**Carolyn Grohmann**

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## Abstract

In 1918, the signing of the armistice at the end of the First World War, brought about the return of the region known as Elsaß-Lothringen, Alsace-Lorraine, to France after 47 years of German rule. This thesis examines the problems which the integration process created for the heterogeneous population of the Moselle (annexed Lorraine), a population which included those who were indigenous to the region, Germans from all over the German Reich, and immigrants from elsewhere in Europe. In this integration process, the French authorities attempted to undo the effects of Germanisation on all levels: linguistic, cultural, political, economic, administrative, and demographic. However, the manner in which they attempted to achieve *francisation*, soon alienated large sections of the indigenous population. This sense of unease and dissatisfaction manifested itself within weeks of the entry of French troops to the region and became known as the *malaise lorrain*. Sacrifices forced upon the region by integration included a disappointingly sluggish economic recovery. Equally, whilst a process of *épuration*, or ethnic cleansing, deported three quarters of the Moselle's German community, many among the indigenous population were obliged to prove their loyalty to France at specially created tribunals to allow them to remain in the region.

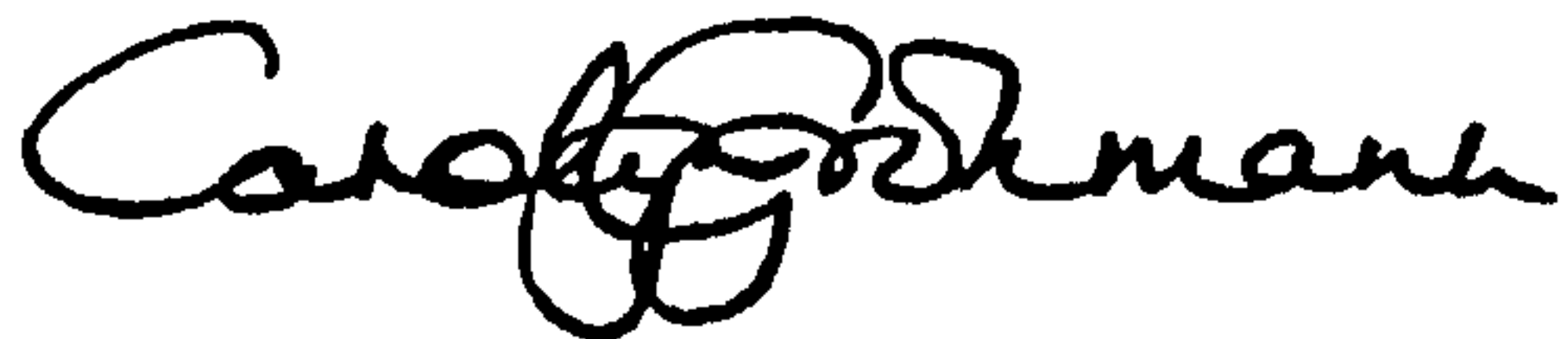
This thesis brings to light the region's experience which the historiography has hitherto treated as less controversial and less problematic than that of its neighbour, Alsace. *Mosellan particularisme*, which sought a middle ground between separatist regionalism and complete assimilation into France, was not as radical, reactionary, or well publicized as Alsatian autonomism. However, it was, in the long-term, far more successful.



## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that the work it embodies has been done by myself, and has not been included in any other thesis.

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn Goldman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carolyn" and the last name "Goldman" clearly distinguishable.

**30 September 1999**

## Acknowledgements

This page of acknowledgements rather shoots down in flames my image as the lonely, PhD student - the solitary figure, trudging from archive to archive, friendless and penniless. To the following army of supporters, advisers, and sponsors, therefore, I owe my very sincere thanks: my supervisors, Professor George Peden and Professor Siân Reynolds, for their encouragement, calm efficiency, and confidence in both me and my chosen topic; Professor Paul Smith, to whom I am equally indebted, for his enthusiasm, wit, and knowledge throughout; Vaughan Wells for being thorough and completely reliable, and for reuniting my infinitives; Piero-Dominique Galloro, Marie-Louise Antenucci, Akiyoshi Nishiyama, General Georges Philippot, Pierre Schill, Professor François Roth, Professor Rainer Hudemann, Jean-Luc Moresi, Maître Michel Créhange, and Madame Heber-Suffrin, who are my friends and acquaintances ‘in the field’ where I am better known by my maiden name, Scott; the History Departmental Assistants and staff at the University of Stirling; the staff of the *Archives départementales de la Moselle*; and, for their technical and much needed moral support, Joyce Miller, Martin Coventry, Miguel Giménez, Norrie LaPorte, Angela Woodford, Emma MacLeod, Mike Rapport, Annette Haas, and, of course, my parents.

In particular, I thank K for enriching the story and G for entrusting it to me.

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## Notes on Usage

While virtually no terminology which can be applied to the regions discussed in this thesis is free from ambiguity, controversy, or confusion, consistency has been deemed the most satisfactory solution. The choice of terms, therefore, should not be read as an indication of any value judgement of the validity of French or German sovereignty over the regions.

The French and English term *Alsace-Lorraine* is used here to refer to the regions annexed by Germany during the periods 1871 to 1918, and 1940 to 1945, regions known in German as *Elsaß-Lothringen*. Outwith these periods, this collective term is dropped and the regions are referred to separately. However, the part of Lorraine which fell within the annexed territory is referred to throughout as *annexed Lorraine* during periods of annexation and as the *Moselle* for the inter-war and post-Second World War periods. Otherwise, the term *Lorraine* refers to the French region which, during periods of German annexation, contained three departments (the Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Vosges, and the Meuse) but also included the Moselle in the inter-war and post-Second World War periods. See chapter one for further explanations regarding frontier changes.

The inhabitants of this region, although often known as *Lorrainers*, *Lothringers*, or *Lorrains*, are referred to here as *Mosellans*, meaning inhabitants of the Moselle according to its 1871 boundaries, in order to distinguish them from inhabitants of the region of Lorraine as a whole. The term *indigènes* is used here to denote those who, prior to 1871, held French nationality and were resident in the region, as well as their descendants. They are also referred to in certain documents as *Mosellans de*



*vieille souche* or as *autochtones*. During the period of annexation, 1871 to 1918, large numbers of Germans from other parts of Germany emigrated to the region. These individuals are referred to here as *German immigrants*, even though they originated from other parts of the same country and considered themselves *Elsaß-Lothringer*. The term *Français de l'intérieur* refers to French arriving in the regions after the armistice of 1918 from elsewhere in France, at that stage still thought of as the 'interior'.

Throughout this thesis, current, and therefore French, names of towns and villages are used even though they may be known locally by their German or dialectal equivalents. This is in order to avoid cumbersome translations and to assist the reader in locating them on national or international maps. It is also a reflection of the fact that during the period addressed by this thesis, they were officially known by their French, rather than German, names. See appendix I which contains a list of towns with their French and German names.

As far as possible, spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes in primary documentation from French, German, and English language sources have been left uncorrected in order to remain faithful to the original sources. In some cases, such errors were made when documents were copied by clerical staff. In other cases, errors resulted from authors' lack of familiarity with a particular language.



**Map 1: The Moselle and Alsace  
at the crossroads of Europe,  
1871 to the present day.**



Map 2: The Moselle, 1871 to present day.



## Abbrieviations

ADBR	<i>Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin</i>
ADM	<i>Archives départementales de la Moselle</i>
ANSBV	<i>Bulletin de liaison de l'association nationale du souvenir de la bataille de Verdun et de la sauvegarde de ses haut lieux</i>
CARAN	<i>Centre d'accueil et de recherche des archives nationales</i>
CEH	Journal of Central European History
EAU	<i>Espace Archives Usinor</i>
FO	Foreign Office papers
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
LPF	<i>Ligue Patriotique des Françaises</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>
UNRD	<i>Union Nationale Républicaine Démocratique</i>
UPRA	<i>Union Populaire Républicaine d'Alsace</i>
URL	<i>Union Républicaine Lorraine</i>

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**Map 4:** The Departments of the Moselle and the  
Meurthe-et-Moselle, 1871 to present day

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# Chapter I

## The Moselle

### in Historical Context

In 1976, the publication of François Roth's *La Lorraine annexée (1870-1918)*<sup>1</sup> marked a turning point in the historiography of the Moselle. In his introduction, Roth explains the origins of his study, which began as his doctoral thesis, and which today still forms the backbone of scholarship on the history of the Moselle in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Peu à peu, j'ai acquis la conviction qu'il fallait donner à  
cette région un instrument scientifique pour lui permettre  
de reconnaître un passé récent qui pèse sur les  
générations anciennes et que les nouvelles ignorent,  
rejettent ou approchent à partir de clichés déformants.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the thesis presented here does not claim to provide a study on the scale of Monsieur Roth's *magnum opus*, it has nonetheless applied these comments to the immediate post-war period 1918 to 1925, a period which has suffered its share of 'clichés déformants' and which, hitherto, has escaped the in-depth scrutiny of the historian.

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<sup>1</sup> Roth, François, *La Lorraine annexée. Etude sur la Présidence de Lorraine dans l'Empire allemand (1870-1918)*, Nancy, 1976. This work was originally Roth's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Nancy II in 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.9.

### *The backdrop*

Authors of books and articles on the recent history of annexed Lorraine often choose as their opening statement the surprising or even shocking fact that within the space of 74 years, potentially the lifetime of one healthy individual, the people of the regions of the Moselle and Alsace witnessed four changes to their nationality. This fact is all the more shocking because these changes took place in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> However, the history of these regions did not simply become remarkable from 1870 onwards with the onset of the Franco-Prussian War. Indeed, the events surrounding the Franco-Prussian War, the subsequent annexation of the regions by Germany, the retrieval of the regions by France at the end of the First World War, their reannexation by Germany in 1940, and finally their return to French rule in 1945, are largely the result of French and German interpretations of several centuries of spectacular historical events. Such momentous turning points often found the regions at the heart of the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires.

In 451, what became known as the city of Metz, the current administrative capital of Lorraine and *chef-lieu* of the Moselle department, was almost entirely destroyed by Attila the Hun as he and his army set about dismantling the Roman Empire. In the sixth century, Metz became the capital of the Merovingian kingdom of Austrasia, which included the north-eastern territories of ancient Gaul and was the birth-place of the Carolingian dynasty. By the eleventh century, the region of Lotharingia, which included the regions now known as Lorraine as well as Alsace, found itself entirely contained within the Holy Roman Empire, allowing German control over the region to dominate. For the next five centuries, the region was fought over by various French dukes to the west and the German Empire to the East. In



1552, French armies occupied the areas around Metz, Toul, and Verdun known as the *Trois Evêchés*, areas which were finally ceded to France by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. However, in 1738, the complexities of marriages among the various European dynasties, meant the region of Lorraine found itself under the rule of the Polish King Stanislaw Leszczynski, father-in-law of Louis XV of France. Upon his death in 1766, Lorraine fell, for the first time, under French sovereignty. It retained, however, a high degree of autonomy over its own affairs. It is this chequered history, spanning the centuries from the Roman Empire right up to the French Revolution and beyond, which provided the justification for French and German nationalist claims to the region in the nineteenth century, in particular the area which falls to the north of the linguistic frontier containing the region's Germanophone population. Such arguments, based on cultural, linguistic, as well as historical factors, were similar to those applied to Alsace, even though the two regions had always been separated geographically by the Vosges mountains and historically by entirely different histories.<sup>4</sup>

The creation of the system of departments in 1790, at the time of the French Revolution, divided the Lorraine region into four: the Moselle, the Meurthe, the Vosges, and the Meuse. The loss of the Saarland from the Moselle department to the German Confederation in 1815 and, half a century later, alterations to regional boundaries made by the Treaty of Frankfurt, mean that the period of greatest stability for the department's boundaries has been from 1871 to the present day, despite the frequent changes to French and German national frontiers which have crossed from one side of the Moselle to the other with alarming frequency.

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<sup>3</sup> For the populations of the Balkans or Poland, for example, such a state of affairs is equally common.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter two *passim*, elaborates on the need to differentiate more clearly between the Moselle and Alsace.

**Map 3: Departments of the Moselle  
and the Meurthe, 1815-1871.**



**Map 4: Departments of the Moselle  
and the Meurthe-et-Moselle, 1871 to  
the present day.**



Whilst annexation of Alsace involved taking the region's departments of the Bas-Rhin and the Haut-Rhin more or less intact,<sup>5</sup> annexed Lorraine did not reflect the pre-1871 departmental boundaries of the Moselle, as can be seen in maps 3 and 4 on the previous page. The *arrondissement* of Briey to the west of the Moselle remained French and became part of the Meurthe, which resulted in the renaming of this department as the Meurthe-et-Moselle. To the south-east of the Moselle were added the *arrondissements* of Sarrebourg (with the exception of 11 *communes*) and Château-Salins (with the exception of 9 *communes*), both formerly of the Meurthe region. At the preliminaries for peace, the territory of Belfort was offered by the Germans in exchange for eleven *communes* in the *arrondissement* of Briey. Although the region's total population and land mass were almost unchanged by these alterations, the elongated shape of what had been the Moselle was lost and a new, plumper region had been created.<sup>6</sup>

These changes were the result of Bismarck's careful consideration of Germany's requirements of the annexation process. The position of the linguistic frontier<sup>7</sup> dictated the minimum area to be annexed, in line with popular opinion within Prussia which was increasingly in favour of the annexation of Alsace, with its seemingly Germanic culture. This obliged Bismarck to annex the Germanophone sector of Lorraine where the majority of the annexed populations either spoke German

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<sup>5</sup> A small stretch of land, previously part of the department of the Vosges, was included with the whole of Bas-Rhin, while the territory of Belfort, to the south, was lost from Haut-Rhin. Annexation of Alsace, therefore, left the region largely unchanged.

<sup>6</sup> See Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.40. Roth's description of the peace negotiations and extent of annexation as it affected Lorraine is very detailed and helpful.

<sup>7</sup> See map 1, p.vi.



or a Germanic dialect, even though the dialects varied from area to area.<sup>8</sup> However, more importantly, Bismarck had to ensure that annexation of French territory would serve as a means of preventing further French aggression across the weakest point of the Franco-German frontier, turning the annexed regions into a military buffer zone. This meant venturing far enough into Lorraine to take the garrison town of Metz, without accumulating too much of the Francophone sector which would undoubtedly prove difficult to integrate into the *Reich*.

The next consideration facing Bismarck was economic. The further into the Moselle department he went, the greater the rewards from the region's coal and iron ore deposits and factories. During the period of Prussian occupation of Alsace and the Moselle, German specialists investigated the potential which lay in the Moselle's coal and iron ore fields. They were careful to include, therefore, the iron and steel factories at Ars, Moyeuvre, and Hayange in the annexed territory.<sup>9</sup> However, the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt by no means marked the end of the negotiations to decide the territorial limitations of annexation, and, among others, the de Wendel industrialists did their best to persuade Bismarck to listen to their demands.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, as Roth states, economic factors do not appear to have been placed high on Bismarck's list of priorities either, in terms of his war aims or in his expectations for the peace settlement. It was perhaps more of a happy coincidence, therefore, that the bulk of Lorraine's mining and industrial potential fell on the German side of the new border, in an operation which was otherwise based chiefly on military strategy.

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<sup>8</sup> See Lévy, Paul, *Histoire linguistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 2 vols., Strasbourg, Paris, 1929. Also, Toussaint, Maurice, *La frontière linguistique en Lorraine (fluctuations et délimitations)*, Paris, 1955. And more recently, Simmer, Alain, *L'origine de la frontière linguistique en Lorraine. La fin des mythes?*, Knutange, 1995. Also, Loew, Guy, 'Vers la disparition des frontières? L'exemple des frontières du département de la Moselle', in *Cahiers Lorrains*, No.3, September 1996, pp.227-232.

<sup>9</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.37.



With the ratification of the preliminary peace on 2 March 1871, Prussia, soon to be at the head of a unified Germany, officially took up the reins as sovereign of the *Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen*, a so-called imperial territory which was treated as something between a fully fledged federal state in the Second Reich and, as its indigenous populations were to see it, as a form of colony. It was from that date onwards that Prussia was legally allowed to extend its authority beyond ensuring security and order among the regions' populations. In fact, Silverman argues that, during the period preceding ratification of the peace treaty, Prussia had overstepped its mandate by regulating education and religion in the provinces.<sup>11</sup> Another criticism of Prussia's handling of annexation stems from the right of option of nationality granted to the populations. Annexation brought with it the automatic bestowal of German nationality on all *Mosellans* and Alsatians living in the regions. Those who wished to retain French nationality could do so, but were obliged to transfer their domicile to France before 1 October 1872.<sup>12</sup> Whilst there was at least an element of choice implicit in this, the reality of being obliged to leave homes, livelihoods, friends, and family, was harsh indeed.

The movement of population which resulted from the right of option saw 6.5 per cent of the population of Lower Alsace (equivalent to the current department of the Bas-Rhin) and 6 per cent of the population of annexed Lorraine opt for French nationality, whereas 20.3 per cent of the population of Upper Alsace (equivalent to the current department of the Haut-Rhin) became *optants*. This massive difference was

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<sup>10</sup> In the end, the de Wendels resolved their problems by setting up companies in both French and German Lorraine. See chapter seven p.257 on the economy.

<sup>11</sup> Silverman, Dan, P., *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*, Pennsylvania, 1972, p.31. Similar accusations were to be made against the French in the lead up to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, 47 years later. See chapter three, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> See Wahl, Alfred, *L'Option et l'émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains (1871-1872)*, Paris, 1974. See also Roth, François, *La Lorraine annexée*, Nancy, 1976, chapter 3, pp.93-124.

due to the successful efforts of the *Ligue d'Alsace*, a group whose enthusiastic propaganda promoted opting for French nationality as a matter of principle. However, the overall figure for Upper Alsace was almost equalled by that of the city of Metz which saw the departure of 20.5 per cent of its total population, in stark contrast to the smaller towns and rural regions in the Germanophone sector where only between 1.9 per cent and 5.8 per cent of the populations chose to leave. This movement of population, which fell outside the pre-existing patterns of emigration already apparent prior to the Franco-Prussian War, involved the departure of much of the region's largely Francophone *classe des notables* from Metz and was to have a seriously damaging effect upon the ability of the Francophile community to resist Germanisation of the region's politics, society, educational and religious institutions, culture, and, most importantly, language. For many middle class professionals, the right of option forced them to choose between two evils: remain in the region and be obliged to adapt to a new and alien way of life, or depart and be forced to sell homes, businesses, and property, leaving behind family and friends. The statistics show a preponderance of young males leaving the region, many of whom considered the prospect of embarking upon their national service in German uniform unacceptable. However, as Paul Smith points out, the role of national identity in dictating an individual's behaviour in such circumstances is more evident among the bourgeoisie, whose education, prosperity, and greater mobility permitted them the luxury of choice which was not always available to the rural or industrial classes.<sup>13</sup> The Catholic Church appears to have been left largely intact and it provided continuity in terms of leadership which bridged the gap between French and German rule. But even its hierarchy, over the half century of

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, Paul, 'A la recherche d'une identité nationale en Alsace', in *Vingtième Siècle*, No.50, April-June, 1996, pp.23-35, p.26.



Germanisation, was unable to deflect entirely the influence of German Catholicism on its younger priests, educated in German schools and later in universities across the German *Reich*.<sup>14</sup>

In other areas, Germanisation was to have a similar, creeping success. The introduction of German as the official language was clearly the benchmark for success elsewhere, and was made by way of a period of transition in the Francophone regions, whereby, according to the progress of individual *communes*, delays could be negotiated to allow the populations time to adapt.<sup>15</sup> To the north of the linguistic frontier, German was immediately introduced. Certain *communes* which lay on the frontier protested, asking permission for a bilingual system, but without success. Over the period of annexation, the number of *communes* permitted to continue using French as the official language had only been reduced from 372 in 1872 to 266 in 1914, an indication, perhaps, of the flexibility and long term nature of the period of 'transition' in the minds of the German civilian authorities.<sup>16</sup> However, the nature and manner in which overall Germanisation policy was applied varied throughout the period, at times showing leniency towards the indigenous populations and allowing the use of French and the maintenance of French practices. At others, the regime indulged in an unfortunate authoritarianism, notably in 1887, which inevitably set the process back rather than advancing its cause. Initially, on the political scene, annexation aroused furious opposition around the provinces. Their deputies, elected to the French parliament during the war, made their famous and indignant protest on 17 February

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<sup>14</sup> See Roth, François, *Les Lorrains entre la France et L'Allemagne*, Nancy, 1981, p.209.

<sup>15</sup> Linguistic Germanisation also affected the names of towns and villages around the region, and those to the north of the linguistic frontier were officially changed to German equivalents. During the First World War, Germanisation of place names was extended to all towns and villages in the Francophone sector as the policy was stepped up by the military authorities. See appendice I for examples of these changes and translations.

<sup>16</sup> See Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, pp.84-85.

1871 to the *assemblée nationale* in Bordeaux,<sup>17</sup> renewed in 1874 at the German *Reichstag*, against the cession of part of the Moselle, the *arrondissements* of the Meurthe, and Alsace to Prussia. This initial protest developed in the early years of annexation into a political movement of *protestation*, decrying the fact that the populations had not been consulted by way of a plebiscite on the question of a change to their sovereignty. However, as time passed, and the likelihood of a plebiscite or a return to French sovereignty receded, so *protestation* was replaced in the region by the 1890s with a more accommodating political movement, which looked increasingly to the influence of German political parties such as the socialist SPD (the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) and the German Catholic Centre Party (the *Zentrum*).

This political adaptation to life in the German *Reich* reflected a more general acceptance of the *status quo* in the regions. Economic prosperity, special concessions granted to the provinces to limit the impact of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, and social legislation, which was ahead of its time, sweetened what was otherwise the bitter pill of Germanisation for large numbers of *indigènes*. More than anything, the realisation gradually dawned on the more Francophile indigenous population that international and diplomatic moves, designed to bring about a reunification of Alsace-Lorraine with France, were becoming increasingly rare. The future was unmistakably German.

Aside from passive resistance, more evident in rural areas where German influence was less inclined to penetrate and therefore more obvious when it did, what was a tacit acceptance of German rule, developed into a more evident sense of positive accommodation. By the turn of the century, the younger generations in particular,

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<sup>17</sup> As a result of the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, the French parliament was forced to re-house itself temporarily in Bordeaux.



were increasingly willing to work with, rather than parallel to or even against, the German authorities.<sup>18</sup>

By 1890, the unprompted arrival in annexed Lorraine of large numbers of German immigrants, who were enthusiastically welcomed by the authorities, included largely urban professionals, military personnel, and civil servants. The second wave, arriving after 1890, brought more formally recruited miners and factory workers, especially to the areas surrounding Thionville and Forbach.<sup>19</sup> By 1895, 22 per cent of annexed Lorraine's population was German, compared to 14 per cent for the whole of Alsace-Lorraine. Yet German immigration was unevenly distributed around the region. Metz provides the most remarkable statistics: by 1895, the indigenous population of 21,061 was outnumbered by the German immigrant population of 21,305.<sup>20</sup>

Many of these immigrants genuinely liked Lothringen and quickly set about making it their home. However, assimilation with the indigenous populations was, on the whole, patchy. In the towns and cities around the region, German communities were large enough for them to be self-sufficient, whilst religion played its part in widening the gap. Most of the arriving German immigrants were Protestant, and their large numbers boosted that community in the region from roughly 7,000 before annexation to 74,000 by 1910.<sup>21</sup> The vast majority of the indigenous population, though, was Catholic. The assimilation process was also affected by Germany's unwillingness to treat Alsace-Lorraine in the same way as other German states. This was despite federalism, which, in theory, ought to have been able to cope with the kind

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<sup>18</sup> See Roth, *Les Lorrains entre la France et l'Allemagne*, p.209.

<sup>19</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, Nancy, 1976, p.116.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.119.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.140.

of diversity presented by Alsace-Lorraine's multi-cultural population.<sup>22</sup> It was as late as 1911 that Germany finally granted the *Reichsland* its own constitution providing an elected regional parliament, a *Landtag*, which gave the regions representation in the *Bundesrat*. However, this constitution still did not give Alsace-Lorraine the status of a fully fledged federal state. The unelected *Statthalter*, or imperial governor, nominated the *Bundesrat* representatives and continued to share power with the *Landtag*. Germany was clearly unwilling to entrust to its *Reichsland* the autonomy so many within its population desired, despite the major signs of progress in the Germanisation process.

The declaration of war in 1914 saw annexed Lorraine and Alsace fall under the authority of martial law, replacing the civilian administration which had employed other, often gentler, means to Germanise the provinces. Six days at the end of July 1914 provided the German regime's adversaries in annexed Lorraine a last opportunity to leave the region, notably Jean-Pierre Jean<sup>23</sup>, the *chanoine* Collin<sup>24</sup>, and the industrialist de Wendel brothers. Those left behind were subjected to the strictest measures including the suspension of individual liberty and freedom of the press. French newspapers were suspended, and censorship of German language newspapers was introduced. The police and military authorities were permitted to arrest and imprison those considered to be French sympathisers or opponents of the German regime, raiding homes and businesses as required. Political parties were all but banned, with mobilisation of the region's male population draining the life out of most institutions and organisations. More than anything, this period saw the greatest efforts

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, 'A la recherche d'une identité', in *Vingtième Siècle*, No.50, April-June 1996, pp.23-35, p.28.

<sup>23</sup> Founding member of the *Souvenir Français*, a group set up to erect and maintain monuments to *Mosellan* and *Alsatian* war-dead of the Franco-Prussian War, but also, unofficially, to sustain the memory of France throughout annexation.



to suppress the use of the French language. Such efforts focused on preventing its use in public, particularly in Metz, and stepping up Germanisation of *communes* still permitted to use French. Such measures meant that the consequences of the declaration of war in 1914 were far more demoralising for the Francophone population of the Moselle than for the rest of the *indigènes* living in the *Reichsland*.

Four long years of war were to have a profound effect on the outlook of the populations and, as detailed in chapter three, were to play a crucial role in dictating the population's reaction to a German defeat. As the armistice signalled the return of the provinces to France, attention turned to the reunion of two peoples which had spent almost half a century apart, and which were each to confront the moment of reunion with almost diametrically opposing expectations. There was little indication, therefore, that what lay ahead would provide a break in the notoriously complex and traumatic history of these provinces.

### *The historiography so far*

The subject of the disputed territories of Alsace and the Moselle has for well over a century encouraged the widest possible debate encompassing the regions' culture, administration, politics, identity, religion, education, language, and folklore. As far back as the notorious clash between the German historian Theodore Mommsen and the French medievalist, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges in the 1870s, the problems and ambiguities of the subject have been apparent.<sup>25</sup> Yet this clash said far more about the

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<sup>24</sup> Political editor of the French language newspaper *Le Lorrain*.

<sup>25</sup> Mommsen argued that ethnology and linguistics provided the necessary justification for including Alsace in a united Germany. Fustel de Coulanges, on the other hand, dramatically discarded the use of history and proposed the 'principe moderne' of self-determination. See Smith, 'A la recherche d'une identité', in *Vingtième siècle*, No.50, avril-juin, 1996, pp.23-35.

ideological gulf which lay between German and French definitions of the nation than it did about the rightful sovereign of the region of Alsace or the Moselle.

Out of this vast literature, various observations can be made and problems identified. Firstly, the assumption that sentiment automatically follows language is to be guarded against. The use of German does not automatically imply pro-German sentiment, and, likewise, the use of French does not automatically imply pro-French sentiment. For example, on the one hand, the massive three-volume study on Elsaß-Lothringen, 1871 to 1918, edited by Georg Wolfram, was written by Germans writing from a German perspective in the German language.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Joseph Rossé and his co-authors, also writing in German were, in fact, staunchly Catholic Alsatians, who were also autonomists, presenting their specifically Alsatian perspective.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the *mosellan*, abbé Nicolay, published his defence of the concordat, *Elsaß-Lothringen im Kampfe um seine Religiösen Einrichtungen, 1924-26*, in German.<sup>28</sup> However, not all Alsatians or *Mosellans* chose to write in German and Pierri Zind, also an Alsatian with a distinctly autonomist axe to grind, published his work in French.<sup>29</sup> The difference, therefore, between 'German' literature, written by those of German origin, and 'German language' literature, written by those from the regions who simply chose to write or publish in German, is an important one.

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfram, Georg, (ed.), *Das Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen 1871-1918*, 3 vols., Frankfurt, 1931-1938. This work was compiled by Germans who had worked as civil servants in Alsace-Lorraine but who were expelled in 1918. It was published through the *Wissenschaftliches Institut der Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich* based in Frankfurt-am-Main in the 1930s.

<sup>27</sup> Rossé, J., Sturm, M., Bleicher, A., Deiber, F., Keppi, J., *Das Elsaß von 1870-1932*, 4 Vols., Colmar, 1936-1938. These works by Rossé and Wolfram, although presenting very particular perspectives on the subjects they treat, still contain a good deal of information which is indispensable to the historian. Rossé's *Das Elsaß*, in spite of its title, contains information relevant to annexed Lorraine/the Moselle.

<sup>28</sup> Defensor, *Elsaß-Lothringen im Kampfe um seine Religiösen Einrichtungen, 1924-26*, Schwerdorf, 1926. The abbé Nicolay wrote under this pseudonym.

<sup>29</sup> Zind, Pierri, *Elsaß-Lothringen, Alsace-Lorraine, une nation interdite, 1870-1940*, Paris, 1979.



Despite the misleading aspects of language, literature on the subject of *mosellan* and Alsatian history is by no means devoid of bias. Works produced by French patriots in the 1920s flooded onto the market. Frédéric Eccard,<sup>30</sup> Georges Delahache,<sup>31</sup> Anatole Perier,<sup>32</sup> and Jacques Fonlupt-Esperaber<sup>33</sup> were among many who, with varying degrees of nationalist and regionalist emphasis, presented annexation as a mere parenthesis in centuries of French sovereignty over the regions, exaggerating the indigenous population's resistance to Germanisation, and excusing any French ineptitude in the early stages of *désannexion*.<sup>34</sup> Such an exercise in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles is entirely understandable. French patriots living in the regions were, after all, participating in an essential propaganda exercise already embarked upon by the French authorities. However, their interpretation of the return of the provinces to France, has made a lasting impression on historiography written since then. As recently as 1995, Alfred Wahl expressed his exasperation with German historians such as Karl-Heinz Rothenberger,<sup>35</sup> Felicitas von Aretin<sup>36</sup>, and even Lothar

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<sup>30</sup> Eccard, Frédéric, 'L'Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général et après sa suppression', in *Revue politique et parlementaire*, November 1925, pp.197-237. This work is largely sympathetic towards Alsatians, but Eccard's patriotism towards France, rather than Germany, is also evident. His comments are directed, therefore, at those who were perhaps having difficulty understanding the *malaise alsacien*.

<sup>31</sup> Delahache, Georges (ed.), *Les débuts de l'administration française en Alsace et en Lorraine*, Paris, 1921. Delahache provides a version of events which is rather too upbeat and too optimistic for the circumstances and which is distinctly pro-French.

<sup>32</sup> Périer, Anatole, *Séquestres et liquidations des biens allemands en Alsace et Lorraine*, Paris, 1925. This is a defence of the French government's actions as well as an attack on Germany's criticisms of the liquidation process, written, not surprisingly, by the *Directeur du Service des liquidations d'Alsace et de Lorraine* himself.

<sup>33</sup> Fonlupt-Esperaber, Jacques, *Alsace et Lorraine. Hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, Paris, 1945.

<sup>34</sup> The *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris also contains numerous patriotic publications from the immediate post-war period on the subject of the returned provinces. For example, Batiffol, Louis, *L'Alsace est française par ses origines, sa race, son passé*, Paris, 1919. Leblond, Marius-Ary, *L'Alsace et la Lorraine glorifiées par nos écrivains et nos artistes*, Paris, 1919. Halff, S., *La fidélité des Israélites d'Alsace et de Lorraine (1871-1918)*, Paris, 1919. Madelin, Louis, *Les heures merveilleuses d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, Paris, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> Rothenberger, Karl-Heinz, *Die elsass-lothringischen Heimat-und Autonomiebewegung zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen*, Frankfurt, 1976.

<sup>36</sup> Aretin, Felicitas von, *Die Schulpolitik der obersten Schulbehörde im Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen 1871-1914*, unpublished PhD thesis, Florence, 1992.

Kettenacker<sup>37</sup> and Hermann Hiery<sup>38</sup> all of whom, according to Wahl, have insisted upon writing 'revisionist histories' of Alsace-Lorraine's experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such 'revisionism' involves presenting Germany's sovereignty over the regions as largely justified, Germanisation as broadly successful, and French actions in 1918 as far more brutal than German actions had been half a century before. Wahl suggests somewhat disingenuously in his closing remarks, 'Encore faut-il que ces historiens évitent de se laisser trop guider, eux aussi, par le sentiment national.'<sup>39</sup> In fact, German historians can be forgiven for wishing to 'set the record straight' in the light of the French historiography highlighted above. The *Wissenschaftliches Institut* in Frankfurt began the task with works regarded as the German equivalent of revanchist, but was interrupted by the second annexation of the provinces. And, only since the 1970s has the process been tentatively resumed, following German difficulties in dealing with its history in the light of the Nazi era.

A second feature of the literature dealing with these regions is the domination of Alsatian history over that of the Moselle. This is not to say that there is no literature concentrating on the Moselle. Experienced and respected academics such as François Roth, François Reitel, and François-Yves Le Moigne, have written extensively on the region. The problem lies, rather, in publications which, in their titles, purport to deal with Alsace-Lorraine, Elsaß-Lothringen, in other words, both Alsace and annexed Lorraine. A brief glance at secondary and primary sources used by many of these studies reveals the very limited use of the Moselle's archives, newspapers, authors, and statistics. Irmgard Grünewald, for example, in *Die Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich 1918-*

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<sup>37</sup> Kettenacker, Lothar, *Die nationalsozialistische Volkstumpolitik im Elsaß*, Stuttgart, 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Hiery, Hermann, *Reichstagswahlen im Reichsland: Ein Beitrag zur Landesgeschichte von Elsaß-Lothringen und zur Wahlgeschichte des Deutschen Reiches, 1871-1918*, Düsseldorf, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Wahl, Alfred, 'Les historiens allemands et l'Alsace', in *Saisons d'Alsace*, no.128, été 1995, pp.117-122.



1933 consulted only the *Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin* situated in Strasbourg, despite the fact that a disproportionate number of *Elsaß-Lothringer* were forced to leave the Moselle compared with either of the two Alsatian departments.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the use of secondary literature often omits a basic reference work, Roth's *La Lorraine annexée*. Similarly, Stephen Harp, in an otherwise comprehensive and useful study of primary education in Alsace and the Moselle, does not always highlight the differing experiences of the three departments involved.<sup>41</sup> And John E. Craig, in his *Scholarship and Nation Building*, states in his note to the reader, 'The term "Alsations", unless modified, refers to ... those from the ceded portion of Lorraine as well as to those from Alsace.'<sup>42</sup>

The forth-coming and long-awaited publication of Stefan Fisch's *Habilitations* thesis, *Wiedervereinigung von Fremdgewordenem* which will deal exclusively with the constitutional and administrative integration of Alsace in the inter-war period, follows a more satisfactory trend in the historiography in dealing with Alsace on its own.<sup>43</sup> Samuel Goodfellow<sup>44</sup>, John E. Craig, and Paul Smith<sup>45</sup> have all contributed to this trend indicating a growing recognition of the need to separate the two regions, even when studying the periods of German annexation, 1871-1918 and 1940-1945, when

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<sup>40</sup> Grünewald, Irmgard, *Die Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich 1918-1933: ihre Organisationen zwischen Integration und "Kampf um die Seele der Heimat"*, Frankfurt, 1984.

<sup>41</sup> Harp, Stephen, *Learning to be loyal: primary schooling as nation building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940*, Illinois, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Craig, John E., *Scholarship and Nation Building. The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870-1939*, Chicago, 1984.

<sup>43</sup> Fisch, Stefan, *Wiedervereinigung von Fremdgewordenem Studien zur Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgeschichte des Elsaß zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und französischer III. Republik*, Habilitationsschrift, Munich, 1993/1994.

<sup>44</sup> Goodfellow, Samuel, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: fascisms in inter-war Alsace*, Illinois, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, Paul, 'The Alsations and the Alsace-Lorraine Question in European Politics, c.1900-1925', in *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940, Volume V, Ethnic Groups in International Relations*, Smith, Paul, ed., Dartmouth, 1991, pp.59-83, and 'From the Reich to the Republic: Alsace, 1918-1925', in *France: Nation and Regions*, Kelly, M. and Böck, R., eds., Southampton, 1993, pp.182-189.

the two merged into one. In fact, in the current climate of research into national identity, borderlands, and European regionalism, Alsace is enjoying celebrity status at many conferences and in certain journals. The region undoubtedly provides a very convenient focus for a case-study of subjects such as identity, culture, language, and education. But what of the Moselle? Surely their shared history qualifies the territory for a share of the limelight? Is the comparative lack of interest in the Moselle simply a reflection of its inferiority both in terms of land mass and population? Or is it merely that the Moselle's history has been deemed less dramatic and less easily circumscribed than that of its neighbour? What will become apparent in the following chapters, is that the Moselle does indeed deserve a place alongside the better-known Alsace. The Moselle's history is the site of a distinctive history, by no means identical with that of Alsace, yet just as ambiguous, just as complicated, and just as problematic.

In 1986, the *Archives départementales de la Moselle* published its *répertoire numérique de la série M* which contains documents concerning administration and the economy, 1918 to 1940, and included an excellent *orientation bibliographique* for the inter-war period.<sup>46</sup> The authors are quick to point out that whilst the period 1800 to 1870 has received the attention of the historian Henry Contamine in his *Metz et la Moselle de 1814 à 1870*,<sup>47</sup> and in the same way, the period of annexation has been ably covered by François Roth's *La Lorraine annexée (1870-1918)*, 'il n'en est pas de même pour la période suivante de 1918 à 1940'.<sup>48</sup> Although these comments were made in 1986, the situation has altered little in the intervening years. Existing literature includes a number of general works on the region and its history, including those by

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<sup>46</sup> Hiegel, Charles, and Colnat, Jean, *Répertoire numérique de la série M (Administration générale et Economie du département)*, 2ème section: 1918-1940, Metz, 1986, pp.15-26.

<sup>47</sup> Contamine, Henry, *Metz et la Moselle de 1814 à 1870*, 2 vols., Nancy, 1932.

<sup>48</sup> Hiegel, *Répertoire numérique de la série M*, p.15.



Claude Gérard,<sup>49</sup> François-Yves Le Moigne,<sup>50</sup> Jean-Claude Bonnefont,<sup>51</sup> as well as François Roth's more recent compilation of the modern and contemporary editions of the *Encyclopédie illustrée de la Lorraine*.<sup>52</sup> Although all of these authors touch on the inter-war period at one stage or another, the research is seldom in-depth or comprehensive and most do not provide references to their primary or secondary sources. Equally, most of these general surveys cover all four departments of Lorraine, thereby limiting even further the coverage of the Moselle's inter-war experience.

If the general surveys tend to pay too little attention to the inter-war period, the specialised literature provides only a partial corrective. It tends to focus on specific topics or places, again, merely touching on events following the 1918 armistice. For example, industrialisation and the workforce of the region have been capably addressed by authors such as Claude Precheur,<sup>53</sup> Adrien Printz,<sup>54</sup> and Serge Bonnet,<sup>55</sup> and more recently by Pierre Schill,<sup>56</sup> Piero-Dominique Galloro,<sup>57</sup> as well as François Baudin's<sup>58</sup> three volumes on Lorraine's economic and social history. Equally, the University of the Saarland's historians have been responsible for an ambitious programme on urbanism in the frontier regions of France, Germany, and Luxembourg. This impressive project has produced numerous publications under the direction of Rainer

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<sup>49</sup> Gérard, Claude, *La Lorraine contemporaine de 1870 à 1970*, Wettolsheim, 1977.

<sup>50</sup> Le Moigne, François-Yves, *Histoire de Metz*, Toulouse, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> Bonnefont, Jean-Claude, *La Lorraine*, Paris, 1984.

<sup>52</sup> Roth, François, *Encyclopédie illustrée de la Lorraine. L'époque contemporaine*, 2 vols., Metz, 1992 and 1994.

<sup>53</sup> Precheur, Claude, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, Paris, 1959.

<sup>54</sup> Printz, Adrien, *Les immigrés*, Hayange, 1970. Also, Printz, Adrien, *La vallée usinière*, Florange, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Bonnet, Serge, *L'homme du fer. Mineurs de fer et ouvriers sidérurgistes lorrains, 1889-1930*, Metz, 1975.

<sup>56</sup> Schill, Pierre, 'Le mouvement ouvrier dans les mines de charbon de Moselle au lendemain de la Grande Guerre (1918-1919)', in *Cahiers Lorrains*, No. 2, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Galloro, Piero-Dominique, *Ouvriers du fer, princes du vent. Les flux de main-d'oeuvre dans la sidérurgie lorraine (1880-1940)*, Metz, October 1999.

Hudemann and Rolf Wittembrock, including *Stadtentwicklung im deutsch-französisch-luxemburgischen Grenzraum (19 und 20 Jahrhundert)*.<sup>59</sup> One of the project's collaborators, Annette Maas<sup>60</sup> has also worked on monuments and commemoration of the war dead in the Moselle, an interest shared with William Kidd<sup>61</sup> whose most recent research is soon to be published. More localised studies feature prominently in the literature including works by Pierre Brasme<sup>62</sup> on the town of Woippy and François Reitel<sup>63</sup> on Montigny-lès-Metz, whilst Metz itself has attracted considerable attention with works by authors such as François-Yves Le Moigne.<sup>64</sup> Often, however, many of these studies still show evidence that Roth's 'clichés déformants' exist for the inter-war period just as they did for the period of annexation, as authors shy away from a head on confrontation with the 1920s patriotic version of events.

Other, collaborative publications, such as Le Moigne's *Protestants, Messins et Mosellans XVIe-XXe siècles*<sup>65</sup> contain useful and relevant articles. Among others who focus on events in the inter-war period, Chantal Metzger has written about the relationship between autonomists in the Moselle and Alsace.<sup>66</sup> However, despite evidence of an abundance of local interest and of ongoing research, there is no

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<sup>58</sup> Baudin, François, *Histoire économique et sociale de la Lorraine*, 3 vols., Metz, 1992-1997.

<sup>59</sup> Hudemann, Rainer, and Wittembrock, Rolf, *Stadtentwicklung im deutsch-französisch-luxemburgischen Grenzraum (19. und 20. Jahrhundert)*, Saarbrücken, 1991. According to Wahl, Wittembrock is the only German historian to have taken 'une position distanciée et neutre' in his dissertation on town planning, published in 1989.

<sup>60</sup> Maas, Annette, 'Zeitenwende in Elsaß-Lothringen. Denkmalstürze und Umdeutung nationaler Erinnerungslandschaft in Metz (Nov. 1918-1922)', in Winfried Speitkamp ed., *Denkmalsturz*, Göttingen, 1997. See also, Maas, Annette, 'Les monuments aux morts de la guerre franco-allemande autour de Metz (1870/1871-1914/1918)' in *Annales de l'est*, No.4, 1991, pp.303-306. This article provides a summary of Maas' masters thesis.

<sup>61</sup> Kidd, William, 'War, Memory and Commemoration of War in Lorraine, 1908-1988', in *War and Memory in Twentieth-century Europe*, Evans, Martin, and Lunn, Ken, eds., Oxford, 1997, pp.143-159.

<sup>62</sup> Brasme, Pierre, *Woippy, 1871 à nos jours*, Metz, 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Reitel, François, and Arz, Lucien, *Montigny-lès-Metz*, Metz, 1988.

<sup>64</sup> Le Moigne, *Histoire de Metz*.

<sup>65</sup> Le Moigne, François-Yves, (ed.), *Protestants, Messins et Mosellans XVIe-XXe siècles*, Metz, 1988.



indication that a sequel to Roth's highly successful thesis, *La Lorraine annexée*, is on its way, either under his or anyone else's authorship. Various doctoral and masters (*maîtrise*) theses have pointed the way to the gap in the historiography, such as Gérard Diwo's work on communism in the Moselle between 1925 and 1932,<sup>67</sup> Thibault Charmetant's research into the departure of thousands of Germans from the region at the end of the First World War,<sup>68</sup> and Chantal Thiebault's study of the Moselle in the context of Lorrainer politics, 1919-1929.<sup>69</sup> Whilst all of these works can be read to advantage by the student of the Moselle's inter-war history, none has set out to provide a comprehensive, critical, and thorough account of the region's return to French sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> A variety of reasons can account for this. Certain primary sources for the inter-war period were, until more recently, unavailable due to the 50 year rule making the distant period of annexation a more obvious choice. Equally, the absence from the departmental archives of certain key documents from the papers of the prefect's office, including those which dealt with the period of integration between 1919 and 1925, will have undoubtedly diverted some researchers from the task.<sup>71</sup>

More important than the problems of the availability of primary source material, is, however, the nature of the history itself in accounting for the historiographical gap, as the inter-war period in the Moselle's history contains certain aspects with which many

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<sup>66</sup> Metzger, Chantal, 'Relations entre autonomistes lorrains et alsaciens de 1919 à 1932', in *Actes du 103e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes Nancy-Metz, 1978, Section d'histoire moderne et contemporaine, Tome II. La Lorraine de 1610 à nos jours*, Paris, 1979.

<sup>67</sup> Diwo, Gérard, *Le communisme en Moselle (1925-1932) à travers les élections législatives d'avril 1928 et de mai 1932*, masters thesis, Metz, 1982-83.

<sup>68</sup> Charmetant, Thibault, *Expulsions et rapatriements d'Allemands de la Lorraine 'désannexée' 1918-1921*, masters thesis, Metz, 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Thiebault, Chantal, *La Moselle dans le contexte politique lorrain de 1919 à 1929*, PhD thesis, Paris, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Rohr, a school teacher from the Moselle, has compiled a book of *Notes et Documents* concerning the Moselle, 1918 to 1946. His work is heavily reliant on Rossé et al. and, although interesting, contains some errors and few references to source material. Rohr, Joseph, *La Lorraine Mosellane, 1918-1946*, Sarreguemines, 1975.

<sup>71</sup> See section on sources later in this chapter, pp.26-35.

members of the indigenous population, especially among the older generations, have had great difficulty dealing. These aspects are dealt with in the following chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, the success and quality of foreign language literature published to date suggests that a ‘vue de l’étranger’ is a useful and valuable starting point for dismantling the myths and gathering together the primary sources for this subject and period.

### *Scope of chapters*

This thesis addresses the years 1918 to 1925, rather than the entire inter-war period, because this period covers the lifetime of the provisional administrative body, the *commissariat général*, which functioned in place of the *préfecture* and was set up specifically to deal with the integration of Alsace and the Moselle into France. Indeed, it was largely during these years that the major difficulties of integrating the Moselle emerged. This was not strictly the case in Alsace, which experienced political turmoil well into the late 1920s as its autonomist movement clashed with the French authorities, and again in the 1930s as certain autonomist groups and leaders turned to the German National Socialists for support.<sup>72</sup> This and the many other differences and contrasts between the Moselle and Alsace are explored in chapter two, as well as the nature of the relationship the Moselle had with the rest of Lorraine, notably the department of the Meurthe-et-Moselle, Luxembourg, and the Saarland, all countries and regions which share borders with the Moselle.

Although there is no strictly chronological structure, chapter three is devoted to the crucial days and weeks which surrounded the armistice in November 1918: the impact of the German Revolution upon the Moselle; the departure of the German



army; the arrival of French troops; the reaction of the region's inhabitants around whom these events of national significance unfolded.<sup>73</sup> Thereafter, chapters follow a more thematic structuring. Chapter four, 'Administration and the *malaise lorrain*', defines the short-term and long-term administrative forms put in place to deal with integration of the Moselle into France in the context of post-war difficulties experienced throughout Europe. Whilst this process was, in many ways, highly successful, with most aspects of the region's administration controlled by Paris by 1924, the key issues of education, language, religion, and certain legislative questions, caused so much dissatisfaction among the population that major shifts in government policy became necessary in order to resolve the situation. Chapter four, therefore, contains an assessment of how and why these shifts occurred and the way in which dissatisfaction manifested itself in the *malaise lorrain*.

Such criticisms of French policy also extended to the treatment of German immigrants living in the regions at the end of the war. Chapter five examines the manner in which the French authorities set about dealing with these 'foreigners' and seeks to identify the formation and execution of a policy designed to remove them from the region. For the historian, this is the most sensitive issue of the period, and one which few have hitherto examined in any detail.<sup>74</sup> By way of contrast, chapter six provides a micro-study of the lives of a small community of *indigènes*, individuals who were native to the region and therefore able to remain following the armistice. The

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<sup>72</sup> See Goodfellow, *Between the swastika and the cross of Lorraine*.

<sup>73</sup> An earlier draft of chapter three has been published under the title, Scott-Grohmann, Carolyn, 'Cause for Celebration? The return of annexed Lorraine to France, 1918', in *Studia Historica Nitriensia* VII, 1998, pp.233-255.

<sup>74</sup> Pierre Brasme's research on the subject was originally published in 1991 in a journal with a remarkably small readership in the Moselle or Alsace and has seldom been referred to in subsequent publications on related periods or subjects. Brasme, Pierre, 'Expulsions et rapatriements d'Allemands de Moselle au lendemain de la Première Guerre Mondiale (1918-1921), in *Bulletin de liaison de*

principal source used in this chapter is the diary of a young woman, a document which covers the period from the end of the war up to the suppression of the *commissariat général* in 1925.

Chapter seven, whilst principally concerned with the problems of economic integration of the Moselle into France, also looks at the industrial and mining workforce and the mass of immigrant labour working alongside *indigènes*. This chapter also charts the rise of the *malaise économique* which ran parallel to a social, administrative, and, some would say, psychological *malaise* which afflicted the region's populations in the aftermath of a return to French sovereignty. The extent to which this trail of unease and dissatisfaction was carried into the political arena is the basis for the final chapter of the thesis. This provides an attempt to understand the population's reaction to, and accommodation of, French rule in the Moselle region through voting patterns, political movements, and the emergence of new political parties.

Running through all chapters, are themes relating to broader issues, such as the complex questions of identity and sentiment among the Moselle's population. The fluidity of identity and the difficulty in pinning down a definition of an *identité mosellane* quickly become apparent, especially in chapter two. In the Moselle's case, fragmentation of the population is evident where language, religion, class, and ethnicity are concerned. Urban, rural, and industrial divisions compound the problem. And then there is the artificial union with Alsace to address, as well as the difficulty of building the greater identity of Lorraine, so abruptly dismantled by the Treaty of Frankfurt in



1871. National, and even regional, identity, perhaps as a consequence, lie unevenly over these divisions in the Moselle's case.

A further recurring theme is the centre versus periphery debate: the authority of the nation state exercised through its capital city in all decision-making processes, versus regional autonomy over specific affairs. For France in particular, the Third Republic's policy of centralisation was a source of immediate conflict as the regions were suddenly faced with forfeiting the degree of regional autonomy which they had struggled to retrieve and retain under German rule. How this affected the population's perceptions of its new centre and, in turn, how peripheral demands impinged on the sensibilities of the French authorities, is returned to repeatedly in this thesis. Yet perhaps the most fundamental theme of the whole integration process, is that of expectation. Historians have long debated the successes and failures of Germanisation in these provinces, attempting to assess the extent to which Alsace-Lorrainers, Elsaß-Lothringer, were assimilated into the German Reich prior to 1918. Almost all the chapters of this thesis show that individuals, organisations, companies, and even political parties, all function according to that which they anticipate will happen, rather than according to what they may wish will happen. This thesis shows how expectation is interwoven into almost all decision-making processes, into the development of sentiment, into the extent of acceptance of the status quo, as well as the lengths to which individuals will go in order to change the status quo.

Finally, this thesis aims to address not only the official, administrative, and constitutional implications of integrating and reintegrating the Moselle into France, but also the implications of these events as they affected the individual inhabitants of the region: women, as well as men; German immigrants, as well as *indigènes*; *Français de l'intérieur* as well as immigrant workers. And within these groups, are sub-groups:



Catholics, Protestants, and Jews; rural, urban, and industrial populations; Francophone and Germanophone *indigènes*; communists, republicans, and *particularistes*, and so on. The available sources for this period are by no means complete thereby inhibiting anything more than a sampling of these groups and their experiences. Nonetheless, this thesis seeks to draw on as wide a range of documentary evidence as possible.

### *Primary sources*

The principal body of primary sources used in this thesis are those which relate to the civil and military administrations of the Moselle and Alsace in the early inter-war period. Papers from the various archives mentioned below include correspondence between civil servants, the military, and the general public, and a wide variety of reports, surveys, lists, as well as police reports. In the early stages, the military authorities were heavily involved in running the regions and their presence in 1918 and 1919 is evident throughout the documentation. Municipal, regional, and national archives have all been consulted, the most important of which have been the *Archives départementales de la Moselle*. They house various relevant series, notably the M series, which covers general administration and the economy of the department, 1918 to 1940, including collections of documents from the various divisions of the *préfecture de la Moselle*. However, at the beginning of the Second World War, the archive itself was caught up in the drama of historical events in the Moselle. It had been decided by the French authorities, that in the event of a German occupation of Metz, all papers belonging to the prefect's office (dating from 1918) should be destroyed. And so, in the summer of 1940, as the German army advanced on Metz, the order was given to begin burning these papers, a process which was only partially completed when the operation was brought to a halt as the Germans took control of

the prefecture buildings. It was later realised that the sheer quantity of the papers earmarked for incineration, as well as the slowness of the incineration process, had prevented their complete destruction. However, the drama was by no means over. In May 1944, the then director of the state archives in Metz, Dr. Eugen Ewig, decided that parts of the M, L, and Q series, for reasons of security, should be taken from the archive buildings in Metz and transported to the nearby fortress at Mont Saint-Quentin. Once again, catastrophe struck, and the documents involved were systematically destroyed, this time by the German army during the American offensive in the area.<sup>75</sup>

Among the papers destroyed were the collections of papers concerning the prefect's office (initially the *commissaire de la République's* office) for the department of the Moselle, documents which would undoubtedly have contained an invaluable record of the integration process of the Moselle into France. In general, though, not as much was destroyed as was originally thought, and the numerous documents, which can be accessed today in the M series, are testimony to their survival. Despite this, it seems many historians may have decided that the Moselle's archives were incomplete and have preferred to look at what is more readily available in Strasbourg. Those who have done so, will have overlooked the voluminous Z series, *Fonds des sous-préfectures* for the period 1918-1940 in the ADM, extensively used in this research. Both Thionville and Metz-Campagne are particularly rich in documentation, but all dossiers contain numerous reports from the *arrondissements* around the department concerning, among other things, public morale, mining and industry, as well as political reports, notably on communist and socialist meetings and public disorder. The Tp series contains valuable documents on the press, reporting on individual newspapers,

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<sup>75</sup> Details of this account are to be found in Hiegel, *Répertoire numérique de la série M*, pp.3-10.



journalists, and editors, as well as the handling by all newspapers of crises and key issues. Also in the Tp series is documentation from the *service de propagande* which dealt with the distribution of patriotic French material in schools, including postcards and photographs of French wartime heroes such as Marshal Philippe Pétain and Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Private papers in the J series, an excellent newspaper archive (*sous-séries* 6T and 7T), as well as numerous contemporary publications and printed primary sources, including the census results from 1910 (under German administration), 1921, and 1926 (under French administration), all complement the official, administrative papers and have been used extensively below.<sup>76</sup> Naturally, all archival dossiers have been subjected to the sifting and discarding process which all archives are obliged to operate due to the limitations of space. However, despite this, primary source material consulted in the ADM for this thesis has gone a long way to providing a clear picture of events in the 1918-1925 period.

A survey of material held in municipal archives around the region produced useful, if somewhat limited, results. As with the ADM, such archives house documentation relating to administrative matters: municipal councils, the *sous-préfet's* office, and correspondence with the *commissaire* and prefect in Metz. However, in St. Avold, for example, material gathered for a recent exhibition commemorating the 1918 armistice includes eye-witness accounts of the final days of German rule in the town, the arrival of French troops a few days later, speeches made at ceremonies held in honour of the end of the war, and memories of the first contact with the new French authorities. Much of the material held in these municipal archives for the inter-war period has not yet been catalogued. There are three reasons for this: limited resources

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<sup>76</sup> Printed primary source material has also been obtained from the *Section des Alsatiens* in the *Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg*.



at the municipal level; complexities created by the cataloguing of material dating from the German era, (1870-1918)<sup>77</sup>; and a lack of demand from historians for material on the inter-war period compared to the preceding period, as has been indicated in the review of the relevant literature above.

Although the combination of documentation found in the ADM and the region's municipal archives provides the bulk of the source material for this thesis, the *Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin* (ADBR) in Strasbourg are home to an indispensable source of information for the study of the Moselle. The administrative structure, the *commissariat général* was put in place in March 1919 and sustained the *Reichsland* formula of governing the three departments from Strasbourg with an *haut commissaire* in charge of three departmental *commissaires généraux*. Of roughly 80 metres of shelf space devoted to this collection concerning the three departments under German and French rule, a significant number of dossiers include material relating directly to the Moselle, such as weekly reports on the *mosellan* press. Reports by both the civilian and military authorities on the department in general and documents which include sections on economic, industrial, and mining problems, as well as social, political, and administrative issues, help to give an overview of the administration's impression of how integration was progressing, as well as the haphazard manner in which policies were created or adapted as situations developed. Equally, interest in the surrounding border regions of the Saarland and Luxembourg feature regularly in correspondence.

The national archives in Paris, CARAN, hold various collections of documents in its sub-series, AJ 30, which are of crucial importance for research on this period and

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<sup>77</sup> This material is almost exclusively in German which has caused some problems for French archivists, making the task of sifting and cataloguing more time-consuming.

topic, including papers concerning the *Service général d'Alsace-Lorraine*, an administrative body which answered to the *Président du Conseil* and which was created 15 September 1918. Again, reports from the departmental *commissaires généraux* and later from the prefect, are of special interest. Papers belonging to Alexandre Millerand<sup>78</sup>, *commissaire général* in 1919, are also to be found at the national archives (470 AP 46), along with documentation concerning the industrial and political de Wendel family. In the F7 series, useful police reports from the Moselle and Alsace augment primary sources.

A particularly rewarding archive is that of the *Armée de terre* at the Château de Vincennes in Paris. Not only does it contain numerous files specifically concerning the military administration of the Moselle and Alsace between 1918 and 1919, but the 16N series contains reports of the *contrôle postal* set up on 25 November 1918 in Metz. Clearly, such a source is problematic. The reports were written by French officers, most of whom relied heavily upon translators in order to understand letters written in German. Their interpretations of the contents of letters were, inevitably, highly subjective, and, the existence of a *contrôle postal* appears to have been public knowledge. Assessing how many of their authors truly 'spoke from the heart', is almost impossible. Yet, despite this, the reports remain useful to the historian as a means of measuring reaction to the new regime in the absence of many alternative sources.

Material from another public archive and also prepared by civil servants, was used in the research for this thesis, again as a means of gaining an overview of the progress of integration of the provinces into France. The British Foreign Office papers

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<sup>78</sup> Alexandre Millerand was Minister for War from 1914 to 1915. He became *commissaire général* of Alsace and Lorraine in 1919 but left the post becoming Prime Minister of France in 1920 and then



held in the Public Record Office (PRO) in London contain a good selection of the weekly and monthly reports compiled in Paris during this period and later in Strasbourg following the creation of a British consulate there in the early 1920s. Generally, the Foreign Office reports provide an alternative general survey of the situation, their authors often sensitive to such issues as the differences between the Moselle and Alsace, and more sympathetic than their French counterparts to the plight of Germans living in the regions. The purpose of these reports was to monitor the economic, social, and political situation in the provinces which lay at the centre of one of Europe's more turbulent areas in the post-war era, but with an eye firmly on the opportunities for British trade in the area. As such, these reports have been of much use.

The sources mentioned above, authored largely, although by no means exclusively, by French, as well as British, civil servants, provide the broad basis of primary source material consulted in this study. They do not, by any means, constitute an exhaustive list of documents which could be considered relevant to the broad topics of the thesis. German archives, for example in Bonn, Frankfurt, and Koblenz, contain documents relating to those German immigrants who left the provinces in the early years of French sovereignty. These refugees formed support groups and organisations in towns and cities around Germany.<sup>79</sup> And the *Quai d'Orsay* in Paris, home to the French Foreign Ministry papers, contains records of the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine*,<sup>80</sup> set up during the war in order to debate the manner of integrating assimilating the provinces into France. However, time and word limits have obliged the author to make certain sacrifices and to draw certain boundaries. For example,

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President of the Republic between 1920 and 1924.

<sup>79</sup> See Grünwald, *Die Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich*.



although the expulsion and voluntary repatriation of German immigrants from the region is examined in chapter five, there is no attempt to document the difficulties these individuals and families experienced as they attempted to rebuild their lives in Germany. Likewise, although wartime preparations by France for its reunion with its 'lost children' are of great importance in understanding the early approach to integration, it is largely the final conclusions of these preparations which are examined here, rather than the lengthy discussions and debates themselves. This said, three other primary sources have been used to help balance the methodology of this thesis. The first is the remarkable collection held in a private archive, the *Espace Archives Usinor*, housed in the former administrative buildings of the de Wendel company at Serémange near Thionville. Its resources include valuable documents concerning industry and mining in the region. For example, complete dossiers of *comptes rendus*, produced by the *Comité des forges* for the inter-war period, sum up methods of production and output and make comparisons with pre-war production under German management. Also to be found are reports on the morale of the workforce, information on the nature and extent of strike action, personnel registers, and records of workers' clubs and societies. These resources are referred to in chapter seven which deals with the Moselle's economy.

The second additional source worth highlighting, is the region's press.

Complete collections of almost all newspapers published during this period are held in both the ADM and the municipal *Médiathèque* in Metz<sup>81</sup> and a comprehensive study of the Moselle's press, 1860 to 1940, is to be found in François Roth's *Le temps des*

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<sup>80</sup> See also Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *Série Z, Europe, France, Alsace et Lorraine, 1918-1929*.

<sup>81</sup> Collections in the *Médiathèque* in Metz complement the ADM and University of Metz library with an excellent collection of journals, reviews, newspapers, as well as primary and secondary literature relevant to the historian.

*journaux*.<sup>82</sup> Strict control of the press, rather than censorship, was applied to the region's newspapers from November 1918 until autumn 1919. Editors were obliged, on a daily basis, to submit their copy for appraisal by the authorities. Sometimes, certain topics were banned altogether. For example, in March 1918, any advice on profiting from the exchange of currencies was forbidden, and in August 1919, all mention of federalism or autonomism was banned. Newspapers which disobeyed these orders were threatened with suspension. Although control of the press was eventually lifted, the French authorities still retained control over foreign newspapers, particularly those printed in a foreign language, which, of course, included German. This meant that almost half the newspapers read in the Moselle were still subject to the scrutiny of the new French regime during the 1918 to 1925 period. Inevitably, this process had an important impact on the content of newspapers, making it harder to judge the extent to which they accurately reflect opinion in the Moselle in the first few years of French rule. Despite this, the press has still been used in the course of this study, although, at times, it is the treatment of newspapers and their editors which is more revealing, rather than their actual content.

The final primary source used in this thesis is the unpublished diary of a young woman, referred to here as K. The diary is used along with documents and photographs belonging to her family.<sup>83</sup> The diary is analysed in chapter six where it is treated as a very specific case-study of how integration affected one family, offering a

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<sup>82</sup> Roth, François, *Le temps des journaux, presse et cultures nationales en Lorraine mosellane, 1860-1940*, Metz-Nancy, 1983.

<sup>83</sup> K's diary is certainly not the only form of memoir or personal account, published or unpublished, to be found on the inter-war period. Published memoirs, diaries, as well as autobiographical fiction, have been used throughout this thesis. Ernst-Moritz Mungenast and Maurice Barrès fall into the latter category. However, unlike so many others, K's diary was not written for posterity but purely as a personal record of family events and occurrences. Local historians are often in the best position to find and to benefit from such invaluable documents. Other sources have been referred to here, for



glimpse of ordinary life in amongst the official and semi-official documentation referred to elsewhere in the thesis. Of equal importance is the fact that this diary gives a rare chance to examine the experiences of a woman in a subject which is otherwise furnished with sources written by and about men. Some form of oral history might have been useful in overcoming this problem whilst allowing an assessment of individuals' experiences rather than those of communities or of the population as a whole. However, any eyewitness accounts gathered now, more than eighty years after the armistice, from the few remaining survivors of the period, are likely to be highly unreliable, firstly due to the problems of memory and, secondly, due to the difficulty of separating memories of the First World War from those of the Second. And even if the memories are clear, the effect upon individuals' attitudes of the period of Nazification in the Moselle and Alsace, cannot simply be peeled away. The daily entries in the diary give the author's almost instantaneous response to events. Like oral history, though, the diary itself is still problematic. The original, hand-written diary remains in the possession of the author's sister who has asked for the family to remain anonymous, thereby limiting verification of material used here. The diary's author, as a member of the Francophone, Francophile community within the Moselle, provides only one perspective of events whilst the Germanophone community's experience remains more difficult to gauge. Nonetheless, the diary has proved rich in other respects, not least in depicting the struggle of everyday life during the war and in demonstrating the efforts of small communities to retrieve stability and security in the midst of the social, political, and economic upheaval which continued throughout the

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example, Ernst-Moritz Mungenast's novels which can be read as a form of autobiographical fiction (see chapter five).



inter-war period. The judgement here is that difficulties associated with this diary are clearly outweighed by its very great benefits to the historian.

### *Concluding remarks*

Problems with the nature and availability of primary sources for the inter-war period have, perhaps, been responsible for the very obvious gap in the historiography explored above. Likewise, the comparative wealth and continuity of sources available for Alsace make Alsatian history a far simpler, and perhaps more appealing, proposition for prospective scholars. Yet, as the following chapter shows, there are good reasons for enduring these methodological inconveniences. This study seeks, therefore, to open the debate on the Moselle's inter-war history as a way of broadening understanding of how populations, communities, and individuals behave in situations which are not always of their own making.

## Chapter II

### The Moselle

### in Regional Context

One of the most striking features of the Moselle, apart from its heavy industrial skyline juxtaposed with rich rural landscapes and vast forests, is the number of countries and regions it borders. To the north, lie Luxembourg and Germany's Saarland. To the east, the Moselle's *arrondissements* of Sarreguemines, Forbach, Château Salins, and Sarrebourg all border Bas-Rhin, the northern department of Alsace. And to the south, the Moselle meets the Meurthe-et-Moselle and the rest of Lorraine. Belgium is only a matter of kilometres from Audun-le-Tiche which lies on the most westerly tip of the department. Long before the days of the European Union with parliaments in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg, connected by *autoroutes* and *autobahnen*, the Moselle lay at the crossroads of Europe. Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of a united Europe, born in Luxembourg in 1886, was nonetheless considered to be a 'Lorrain de bonne souche' because his father was originally from Evrange in the Moselle.<sup>1</sup> His mother, on the other hand, was from Luxembourg, but had been brought up in Alsace. As a child, Schuman spoke three languages: Luxembourgish, French, and German. He died in 1963 at Scy-Chazelles just outside Metz, in the region he considered home. His life provides an intriguing case-study of the influence of the border in shaping and influencing opportunities, attitudes and identity. Similarly, it was the relationship of the Moselle's population with these next door neighbours

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<sup>1</sup> Tribout de Morembert, Henri. *Hommes illustres de Lorraine*. Colmar, 1982.

which was to play the most crucial part in the inter-war development of its identity.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter assesses these relationships and asks what distinguished the Moselle from its neighbours in terms of historical experiences, economic factors, demographic patterns, and cultural distinctions. It also examines the common interests shared by these regions and the impact such links were to have on the formation of an *identité mosellane*.

### *Le joug alsacien*

Upon arriving in Alsace in 1789, the Englishman Arthur Young remarked, 'I found myself to all appearance veritably in Germany ... here not one person in a hundred has a word of French.' He went on to describe how striking it was 'to cross a great range of mountains [the Vosges]; to enter a level plain, inhabited by a people totally distinct and different from France, with manners, language, ideas, prejudices, and habits all different.'<sup>1</sup> Young's impressions at the time of the French Revolution, neatly sum up the dramatic differences between the populations either side of the Vosges mountains. By 1871, these differences had hardly altered and annexation of Alsace by Germany was, on a superficial level at least, easy to explain. What was less easy to justify, was the uniting of this culturally distinct region with part of Lorraine thereby creating one region, the *Reichsland* Elsaß-Lothringen. Bismarck's linguistic and military grounds for extending annexation beyond Alsace were logical enough. However, few could have imagined the extent of the mutual distrust, dissatisfaction, and friction which was to develop between the inhabitants of these neighbouring regions over the following

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis does not seek to enter the broader debate on regionalism and regional identity in France during the inter-war period. However, the Moselle's particular brand of regional diversification will hopefully serve as an extreme and unusual case.

<sup>1</sup> Young, Arthur, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*, Cambridge, 1979, p.180.



half century. In 1920, the French language newspaper, *Le Messin*, defined, in no uncertain terms, the antagonism created by this unnatural cohabitation, prescribed by the Treaty of Frankfurt. 'Il n'y a pas d'Alsace-Lorraine; ce mot n'existe que dans le traité de Francfort. Il y a une Alsace et une Lorraine, deux pays aussi dissemblables que la Bretagne et le Languedoc...'.<sup>4</sup> Alexander Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst also noted in his memoirs, 'L'Alsacien-Lorrain' était une entité qui n'existait que sur le papier... Le seul lien qui les unissait était artificiel'.<sup>5</sup>

The differences which set these two peoples apart are numerous.

Geographically, Alsace lies almost entirely between the Vosges mountains to the west and the Rhine river to the east. These natural frontiers have provided the region with a degree of stability over more recent centuries of the kind woefully lacking in Lorraine, which has relied on the politics of nation states, rather than nature, to define its boundaries. The linguistic frontier winds its way through the Vosges mountains, corresponding somewhat to the western boundary of Alsace, allowing the bulk of the Alsatian population to fall on the Germanophone side.<sup>6</sup> However, this same frontier continues into the Moselle, dividing it almost equally in two, cutting up to the south of Sarrebourg, to the north of Château Salins, climbing steeply to the south of Thionville, and then on up into Luxembourg. In 1910, following nearly forty years of linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in the *Bulletin de presse Alsacienne*, 1 April 1920, ADBR 121 AL 162.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.677. Alexander Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst was a German politician and civil servant and was the son of Prince Clovis von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, *Statthalter* of Alsace-Lorraine, 1885 to 1894.

<sup>6</sup> See map 1, p vi. Those on the Germanophone side of the linguistic frontier in Alsace and Lorraine speak various dialects which are considered Germanic and are sometimes referred to as *Muttersprache*. This does not automatically imply that they speak *Hochdeutsch* or High German, although the step from dialect to German is, in many cases, a relatively small one. Likewise, on the Francophone side of the linguistic frontier, many, particularly rural populations, speak a French dialect, sometimes referred to as *patois*. During German annexation, and again during the inter-war period of French rule, local dialects were increasingly used as a means of defying the authorities of the day and excluding Germans and French who came from 'the interior'. The strength of the Alsatian Germanic dialect is that it also has a written form, which is not the case for the various *Mosellan* dialects.

Germanisation, 3.8 per cent of the population of Lower Alsace and 6.1 per cent of Upper Alsace still considered French to be their mother tongue, compared with 22.3 per cent of annexed Lorraine.<sup>7</sup> Whilst these rather bald statistics leave no space for the complexities and nuances of language in all three provinces, they give some indication of how things looked to the German authorities, who sought the establishment of the German language in its own right by pushing French and its dialects back to the political frontier.<sup>8</sup>

From the earliest stages of annexation, a social hierarchy emerged in the provinces. Germans found their place at the top, Alsatians followed some distance behind, and *Mosellans* brought up the rear. Where Alsatians, in particular Protestants, were able to make progress up the career ladder in the civil service, the same could not be said for the largely Catholic *indigènes* in annexed Lorraine. Increasing numbers of Alsatians found themselves posted to Metz and other towns around the region, to the dismay of the local inhabitants. This comparative distrust of the German authorities vis-à-vis *Mosellans*, resulted from the misgivings Germans felt towards the large Francophone community to be found among the populations of annexed Lorraine. Throughout annexation, many Germans considered language and sentiment to be one and the same and were therefore hostile towards those who spoke French.<sup>9</sup> In any case, only German speakers were able to make much progress either in the more advanced positions of the civil service or in other, liberal professions. The Germanophone sector of annexed Lorraine, with its preponderance of rural and

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<sup>7</sup> Figures from the census of 1910 do not reflect those who considered themselves to be bilingual, *Office de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 1921, p.22, ADM BA 260. Any question concerning language and the mother tongue was only included in census results from 1900 onwards so it is not possible to compare these figures with the initial period of annexation. See chapter four, p.125-130.

<sup>8</sup> See Vogler, Bernard, *Histoire culturelle de l'Alsace. Du moyen âge à nos jours, les très riches heures d'une région frontalière*, Strasbourg, 1994, p.305.



industrial populations, could not supply large numbers of ambitious, educated candidates. Likewise, the Francophone sector had been largely drained of its intellectual and professional elites by the demographic rupture of the 1870s, with the result that *indigènes* in Metz were unable to maintain their numerical superiority over the Germans. During the early stages of annexation, a whole generation of the Moselle's Francophone youth, on the brink of university careers at French institutions, were denied the opportunity because of their inability to speak German.

Strasbourg, like Metz, suffered as a result of the departure of its Francophone, professional middle classes following annexation. However, it quickly grew in stature as the years of German rule passed. In 1871, it had immediately become the administrative and political centre for the newly formed *Reichsland*. The French system of departments was replaced with three *Bezirkspräsidium* corresponding to annexed Lorraine and Lower and Upper Alsace, all led by *Bezirkspräsidenten* who took the place of French prefects.<sup>10</sup> Between 1871 and 1879, an *Oberpräsident* or chancellor was created to preside over the affairs of the *Reichsland*. Under this system, decision-making took place both in Strasbourg and Berlin. However, changes brought about in 1879 meant this chancellor was replaced by a *Statthalter* or governor in Strasbourg, who presided over all three provinces.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, a *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen* was created in Strasbourg, thereby dispensing with the need to refer to Berlin and, in turn, increasing the power held in the region's administrative and political capital. On an economic level, Strasbourg also dominated,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. See also Wahl, Alfred, and Richez, Jean-Claude, *L'Alsace entre France et Allemagne, 1850-1950*, Paris, 1993, pp 226-227.

<sup>10</sup> See Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, pp.72-75.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp 59-82



becoming home to the commercial and banking interests of the whole of the *Reichsland*.

Strasbourg's favoured position as the capital of the three regions meant Metz, and to a lesser extent Colmar, lost much of the prestige and status they had enjoyed under French rule. As Le Moigne points out, 'C'est à Strasbourg et à Berlin que se règlent désormais les affaires messines.'<sup>12</sup> Among other things, Strasbourg gained a prestigious new university, although Lujo Brentano, a political economist who was professor of political theory at universities around Europe, did comment, 'the university was the only institution established by the Germans that the Alsatians appreciated'.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fondness expressed by Kaiser Wilhelm II for annexed Lorraine on his numerous visits to Metz and to the château he acquired at Courcelles-Chaussy, no institution on the scale of Strasbourg's university was created there.<sup>14</sup> In the strained circumstances which surrounded the change in sovereignty over the regions, compared with Metz and Colmar, Strasbourg looked like the cat that got the cream.<sup>15</sup>

The domination of the *Reichsland*'s capital city, whilst obviously damaging to *Mosellan* independence, was not the sole or main reason why, by 1918, the region's indigenous population was ready to see *le joug alsacien* thrown out along with the German military regime.<sup>16</sup> In all walks of life, the Moselle consistently showed signs of developing in very different ways from its Alsatian partners, in particular Bas-Rhin.

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<sup>12</sup> Le Moigne, *Histoire de Metz*, p.343.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Craig, *Scholarship and Nation Building*, p.339.

<sup>14</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p 70.

<sup>15</sup> Those among the indigenous populations who voiced objections to the change in sovereign did so not so much because they were against becoming German, but rather because of the manner in which the change had taken place with no consultation in the form of a plebiscite.

<sup>16</sup> It is also worth questioning the extent to which ordinary citizens were truly affected or concerned by such issues. See chapter six, *passim*.

This can be seen most clearly in figures for the population in the Moselle, as the following tables demonstrate.

**Table 1: Total population of the Moselle, the Bas-Rhin, and the Haut-Rhin, 1910, 1921, and 1926.<sup>17</sup>**

<i>Department</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1926</i>
Moselle	655,211	589,120	633,461
Bas-Rhin	700,938	651,986	670,985
Haut-Rhin	517,865	468,943	490,654

**Table 2: Percentage changes in total population of the Moselle, the Bas-Rhin, and the Haut-Rhin, 1910-1921 and 1921-1926.**

<i>Department</i>	<i>1910-1921</i>	<i>1921-1926</i>
Moselle	-10.1	+7.5
Bas-Rhin	-7.0	+2.9
Haut-Rhin	-9.4	+4.6

Results from the 1910, 1921, and 1926 censuses indicate that a higher proportion of the Moselle's population lived in rural, rather than urban, areas compared to the Bas-Rhin and the Haut-Rhin.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the military presence in the Moselle was consistently greater than in neighbouring departments. Table 3 below highlights another marked difference between the regions with a higher proportion of Catholics in

<sup>17</sup> All figures in the remainder of this chapter have been taken from the *Annuaire Statistique, (Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, Moselle). Premier Volume - 1919 à 1931*. ADM, BA 863.

the Moselle's population compared with either of the other departments. Equally, the Moselle experienced the most marked change in the percentage of Protestants within its population which fell from 13 per cent in 1910 to 4.8 per cent in 1926.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 3: Population of the Moselle, Bas-Rhin, and Haut-Rhin in 1910 and 1926 according to religion as a percentage of the total population.**

<i>Department</i>		<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Protestants</i>	<i>Jews</i>
<b>Moselle</b>	<b>1910</b>	85.7	13.0	1.1
	<b>1926</b>	92.4	4.8	1.1
<b>Bas-Rhin</b>	<b>1910</b>	61.9	35.5	2.2
	<b>1926</b>	61.9	28.4	2.0
<b>Haut-Rhin</b>	<b>1910</b>	83.7	14.3	1.5
	<b>1926</b>	86.0	10.5	1.1

Perhaps the most dramatic contrast can be seen in the figures for the number of foreigners in each department according to nationality and the changes which occurred in these figures between 1910 and 1926. As shown by table 4, the number of inhabitants classified as 'foreign' living in the Bas-Rhin came in 1910 to 96,505, in the Haut-Rhin there were 55,317, but in the Moselle, there were 208,499, accounting for nearly a third of the population. Amongst these foreigners were 90,696 Germans in Bas-Rhin, 40,238 in Haut-Rhin, and 164,502 in the Moselle. These figures were all to fall by about 70/80 per cent between 1910 and 1926, as a result of the war and with

<sup>18</sup> The urban populations of Strasbourg, Mulhouse, and to a lesser extent, Colmar, account for this, even though the industrial workforce, which was much larger in the Moselle compared to Alsace, was included in figures for the urban population in each region.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter eight, pp 297-300, for a further examination of the religious profile of the region.



the consequences of the change in sovereignty over the regions. This change was to have a far greater impact upon the Moselle than upon the other two regions, as it involved the departure of 119,603 inhabitants following the 1918 armistice, a fifth of the total population.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 4: 'Foreigners' living in the Moselle, Bas-Rhin, and Haut-Rhin, 1910-1926 (percentage of total population in brackets).<sup>21</sup>**

<i>Department</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1926</i>
Moselle	208,499 (31.8)	85,685 (14.5)	111,049 (17.5)
Bas-Rhin	96,505 (13.8)	24,850 (3.8)	27,013 (4.0)
Haut-Rhin	55,317 (10.7)	20,199 (4.3)	26,158 (5.3)

However, despite the departure of such significant numbers of Germans, a sizeable number remained. Table 5 indicates that this last factor had a very noticeable impact upon the number of marriages between *indigènes* and Germans in the 1920s. For example, in 1920, there were 1,314 such marriages in the Moselle, accounting for three quarters of all unions between *indigènes* and foreigners.<sup>22</sup> In Bas-Rhin there were 807 such marriages, whilst in Haut-Rhin there were only 364.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter five, *passim*, and chapter seven, pp.260-271, which deal with both the departure of Germans and the nature of the immigrant population in the Moselle.

<sup>21</sup> These figures include all those who were not members of the indigenous population and therefore include Germans who, in 1910, were not, strictly speaking, foreigners. Nonetheless, French statistical publications from the 1920s refer to them as 'étrangers'.

<sup>22</sup> German men were twice as likely to marry indigenous women as German women were to marry indigenous men. This is largely because there were more German men living and working in the region during this period compared to women.

**Table 5: Marriages between *indigènes* and Germans and total number of marriages between *indigènes* and foreigners.**

<i>Department</i>		<i>1920</i>	<i>1925</i>
<b>Moselle</b>	<b>Germans</b>	1,314	526
	<b>Total</b>	1,790	895
<b>Bas-Rhin</b>	<b>Germans</b>	807	326
	<b>Total</b>	924	467
<b>Haut-Rhin</b>	<b>Germans</b>	364	57
	<b>Total</b>	592	223

Even strike action taken by workers in the different departments in the 1920s show that workers responded to different crises and different social pressures. For example, strike action peaked in the Moselle in 1923, compared with 1921 for both Alsatian departments.

Many of these differences affecting population figures in the Moselle and Alsace arise from the divergence of industrial activities in and around the respective regions. The Moselle's principal industrial activities stemmed from the richness of iron ore and coal deposits around the region along with iron and steel foundries. Coal deposits form part of the basin around Forbach and Petite-Rosselle which extends into the Saarland. Iron ore mining to the west of the region, from Ars to the south of Metz, to Moyeuvre, Hayange, and Aumetz in the north, form part of the basin which extends into the Meurthe-et-Moselle, Luxembourg, and Belgium. These abundant mineral deposits created links between the Moselle and the Ruhr valley, which supplied the



most suitable kind of coke for use in the processing of iron ore, and to Luxembourg and the Saarland rather than to Alsace. In fact, a successful textile industry was to Alsace what mining, iron, and steel industries were to the Moselle and, upon the region's return to France, Alsatian wool and cotton processing factories were able to produce nearly a quarter of the total output for the whole of France. However, the contrasting industrial activities of the Moselle and Alsace were to place them in entirely different economic contexts in the inter-war period. Equally, the impact of these various industries on the movement of population helped to widen the gap between the two regions from early annexation through to the inter-war period. Heavy industry in the Moselle required ever increasing numbers of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers. *Indigènes* from the Moselle and Alsace supplied the initial workforce and recruitment also began throughout Germany in the 1880s and 1890s, but demand soon outpaced supply and so recruitment offices were set up elsewhere, notably in Italy.<sup>23</sup> The textile industry in Alsace did not have the same manpower requirements, and so most of its workforce was recruited from local areas.

It was not, however, this multitude of differences and contrasts distinguishing the Moselle from Alsace in the eyes of these regions' inhabitants which prompted the French authorities to issue the following order at the end of December 1918;

Faire disparaître à bref délai de toutes pièces officielles  
etc... la dénomination d'Alsace-Lorraine qui est  
purement allemande et n'a jamais correspondu à aucune  
division territoriale française.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Galloro, *Ouvriers du fer, princes du vent*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ordre du Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat du 28 Decembre 1918*, ADM 301 M 52. It proved remarkably difficult for this change in title to catch on. The term 'Alsace-Lorraine' had been used for almost half a century, and it tripped off the tongue rather too easily for it to be quickly erased from everyday speech. In fact, the continuation of the *Reichsland*-style administration in Strasbourg and the

This order merely marked the end of the policy of Germanisation and heralded the beginning of its replacement, *francisation*, which sought to erase all symbols of German rule and replace them with French equivalents. This was not, therefore, an expression of compassion or understanding for the harassed *Mosellan* population. The Moselle still had to wait until 1925 to be free of *le joug alsacien*. Even as late as 1928, Andrée Viollis lamented the extent to which the Moselle had lived in the shadow of Alsace,

Voici beau temps déjà que l'Alsace tient l'affiche.

Parfait. Mais la Lorraine? Car il existe bien une Lorraine  
désannexée. Que dit, que fait cette soeur trop discrète de  
l'Alsace?<sup>25</sup>

From Paris, the *question d'Alsace-Lorraine* looked very different. The preoccupations of the immediate post-war period were exercising the minds of the politicians: the approaching peace conference; the need for security against further German aggression; demobilisation of the country's soldiers; the re-establishment of a constant food supply; and the drive to overcome the threat of a socialist revolution. The concerns of the centre could only accommodate the most general of impressions of what was happening at the periphery. In any case, it seemed that the Moselle and Alsace had an abundance of common interests, not least of which was the shared historical experience of German annexation. Some even felt the Moselle now had

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maintenance of a *statut local* to this day in the provinces mean that in many situations, it has been far easier retaining the term rather than dropping it altogether. Likewise, as has been pointed out in the *Notes on Usage* p.iv, to refer to 'Alsace and Lorraine' is ambiguous as 'Lorraine' is the proper term for the region made up of four departments, three of which were not annexed in 1871. The solution, in recent times, has been to refer to the region of 'Alsace-Moselle' whenever issues concerning laws and legislation peculiar to the three departments arise. In fact, the institute set up (in Strasbourg) to deal with specific legislative questions arising from the *statut local* is called the *Institut du droit local alsacien-mosellan*, hence the decision to refer to 'the Moselle' throughout, rather than to Lorraine or the more clumsy, *Lorraine désannexée*.



more in common with Alsace than it did with the rest of Lorraine. Indeed, a closer look at the geography of the regions shows that where the Vosges mountains extend to the north of Alsace and into the most easterly tip of the Moselle, a small region of Bas-Rhin, known as *Alsace bossue* (the hunchback of Alsace), is separated from the rest of its region. This area, and its inhabitants, have historically been linked with the populations of the *Pays Bitche* and *Sarregueminois*. Indeed, a certain cultural, social, and, in some cases, political communality, between *Mosellans* and Alsatians of these areas can be easily identified, and the few pockets of autonomist activity in the Moselle can often be linked to the ties formed between these areas.

For the regions as a whole, however, common interest in one particular area stood out from all the rest. This was the desire to see the maintenance of the concordatory system which Germany, in true federal style, had left intact whilst it had been completely dismantled elsewhere in France with the laic laws of 1905. The *mosellan* and Alsatian people demonstrated, and were proud of, their staunch allegiance to their religion, in particular the Catholic faith, and both populations expressed their outrage at the proposals of Edouard Herriot's government in 1924, when he attempted to bring the provinces in line with the rest of France by suppressing the *concordat*. However, as will be discussed below, the two regions reacted separately, united in their opposition to Herriot's plans, but choosing different ways to express that opposition. The same was true in the realm of politics, and the stark differences between the regions are once again illustrated in the emergence in the post-war period of different political parties in the two regions. Furthermore, the autonomist movement, which has attracted so much attention in political and historical

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<sup>25</sup> Viollis, Andrée, *Alsace et Lorraine au-dessus des passions*, Paris, 1928, p.153.

research on Alsace over the years, had a far smaller impact on the Moselle as a whole and became yet another important factor in setting the two provinces apart.

It may be that *le joug alsacien* will never quite be lifted from the shoulders of the Moselle's people as long as the local statute continues to bind them together. Certainly, a certain unfriendliness between the provinces can still be detected today, illustrating the extent to which a supposedly shared history will not always bolster a common identity. However, difficult though it has been for the Moselle's inhabitants to separate themselves from Alsatian dominance, were they to find comfort and understanding elsewhere, for example, among their fellow *Lorrains*? After all, the oft repeated saying of the *chanoine* Henri Collin, 'Français hier, Allemands aujourd'hui, Lorrains toujours',<sup>26</sup> expressed the kind of spirit which had helped sustain the morale of many Francophile *Mosellans* throughout annexation. Were the two populations to discover that absence had indeed made the heart grow fonder, or did the Moselle and its erstwhile regional partners merely find they had gradually drifted apart in the intervening years?

### *The local Derby: Metz versus Nancy*

The events of the early 1870s brought dramatic changes to the department of the Meurthe-et-Moselle. Following the Franco-Prussian War, peace had come at a high price with the loss of the region's northern districts. However, as a sense of permanency about annexation grew within the 'lost province', so it grew in the rest of Lorraine over the decades which followed the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt. The

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Roth, *Les Lorrains entre la France et l'Allemagne*, p.7. The *chanoine* Collin was one of the more prominent figures in the Catholic Church responsible for sustaining the memory of France in the Moselle during annexation. A similar saying of the time ran, 'Français ne puis, Allemand ne daigne, Lorrain suis', quoted in Schillinger, Philippe, 'Metz de l'Allemagne à la France 1918-1919', in *Annuaire de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de la Lorraine*, Metz, 1974, pp.123-131, p.124.



population of French Lorraine gradually accustomed itself to the new geography of the region, its new contours, its new, more immediate border with Germany, accepting, almost as a kind of recompense, Nancy's new-found dominance in the north east of France following the elimination of both Strasbourg and Metz from the struggle for the title of *capitale de l'est*.<sup>27</sup> Neither Epinal nor Bar-le-Duc, the *chef-lieux* of the Vosges and the Meuse departments, posed a threat to the title. Nancy also benefited from the right of option granted to the inhabitants of annexed Lorraine and Alsace in 1871, as many opting for French nationality, especially from Metz, chose to move there, prompting the saying, 'Metz n'est plus dans Metz mais toute à Nancy'.<sup>28</sup>

In 1871, therefore, Nancy found itself at the heart of a 'new' Lorraine and went from strength to strength. The demographic boost from annexed Lorraine revived demand for property, schools, and local facilities, all of which attracted further investment, increased employment, and generally raised the morale of the city. New suburbs haphazardly emerged, and diversification of the region's economy, combined with the benefits of gaining the rich iron ore fields previously attached to the Moselle, though not yet exploited, all brought new banking and commercial opportunities to the city. But such prosperity and optimism came at a price. The weak north eastern Franco-German border had lost its military buffer zone which had included Metz, one of the most heavily fortified towns of Europe, if not the world. The price for this was to be paid during the First World War with four years of trench warfare fought in and

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<sup>27</sup> See Roth, François, 'Metz et Nancy: le rôle des facteurs nationaux de 1830 à 1930', in Le Moigne, François-Yves, ed., *Urbanisme et architecture en Lorraine, 1930-1930*, Metz, 1982, pp.173-195, p.189.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Le Moigne, *Histoire de Metz*, p.348.

around the Meurthe-et-Moselle region. Overall, though, by 1914, Nancy had grown accustomed to its new role, prosperity, and borders.<sup>29</sup>

During the same period, Metz had, initially at least, been less fortunate. In the 1870s and 1880s, it had been demographically drained, its morale broken, with the *tutelle de Strasbourg* firmly in place. However, with the arrival of large numbers of German immigrants, the town quickly lost its empty, forlorn atmosphere and improvements in the quality of life gradually filtered through. Bismarck's policies of modernisation of public services and facilities brought significant advances in housing and sanitation, and electric street lighting was also introduced. The greatest progress of all came in the realm of town planning. Metz had been a fortress town since the days of the Roman Empire. Strict laws, restricting the construction of buildings of any kind in close proximity to the fortress walls, set out areas known as 'zones de servitude'. The result for the inhabitants of Metz was that living accommodation was cramped and outdated, with an ever increasing population occupying a limited, and increasingly squalid, space. The incoming Germans were, not surprisingly, quick to recognize the problem and plans were soon made to remove the fortress walls. Changes in the style of warfare allowed them to dispense with the 'zones de servitude' and German architects and town planners were set the task of expanding the city.<sup>30</sup> By the turn of the century, work had begun dismantling the old limitations, and building had begun to the south of the town centre.<sup>31</sup> Even if many of the city's *indigènes* were saddened by the dramatic changes to the city's skyline and the loss of a symbol of the region's ancient heritage, the sound basis of the proposed changes was broadly

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<sup>29</sup> See Roth, 'Metz et Nancy: le rôle des facteurs nationaux de 1830 à 1930', in Le Moigne, *Urbanisme et architecture en Lorraine*.

<sup>30</sup> See Reitel, François, 'Le développement des villes lorraines aux XIXe et XXe siècles', in Le Moigne, ed., *Urbanisme et architecture*, pp.17-36.

<sup>31</sup> The fortress walls took seven years to dismantle. Work began in 1902 and was completed in 1909.



recognized. On the eve of war, the new, and distinctly bourgeois German quarter, was by no means complete. However, there was little doubt that Metz, as a town, had benefited immeasurably from the careful, well thought-out urban planning of the kind so lacking in Nancy since the destruction of its fortress walls in 1697. Furthermore, by 1918, on the eve of the armistice, Metz was largely intact, elegant, although about to endure yet another demographic rupture. Fifty kilometres to the south, Nancy, on the other hand, lay in ruins following the bombardments of four years of war.

The politician Paul Durand commented in 1969, 's'il y a aujourd'hui une Lorraine géographique, cette Lorraine n'a aucun passé historique commun'.<sup>32</sup> This lack of a common history in the region does not simply reflect the break in continuity caused by German annexation of the Moselle in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It also reflects 'une vieille rivalité' which separated Metz and Nancy and which had been festering long before annexation in 1871. According to Barral, 'Chaque ville témoigne une mauvaise humeur jalouse à l'égard de l'autre'. In some cases, even the *lorrain* identity came under fire, as can be seen in Paul Vautrin's pronouncement of 1927. 'Allemands? jamais! Messins, certes toujours! Lorrains, qu'importe, pourvu que ce soit la France!'.<sup>33</sup> In the context of this rivalry, Metz rated itself on its military importance, its heroic past, and ironically, its role in the future defence of France.<sup>34</sup> Nancy, on the other hand, sustained its self-image as a 'ville d'art', a cultural and intellectual haven, far from the brutality of wars and the austerity of fortress towns. From 1871, Nancy had, until 1918, enjoyed the growing concentration of administrative and political power hitherto shared with Metz and

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Barral, Pierre, *L'esprit lorrain: Cet accent singulier du patriotisme français*, Nancy, 1989, p.175.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Barral, *L'esprit lorrain*, p.174. Paul Vautrin was the mayor of Metz at this time.

Strasbourg. It is not surprising, therefore, that no amount of revanchist enthusiasm and joy following the successful return of annexed Lorraine and Alsace to France could compensate for the loss of the title *capitale de l'est*. However, whilst Nancy could almost endure relinquishing the title to Strasbourg, any loss of status to Metz seemed intolerable.

Nowhere is resentment more clearly stated than in an address by the *conseil municipal* of Nancy to the French government entitled 'Défense des intérêts de Nancy' issued on 11 January 1919.<sup>35</sup> The address explains the need for Nancy to safeguard its interests in view of the return of annexed Lorraine and Alsace to France. Whilst it was recognized that everything should be done to ensure the smooth integration of these provinces into France, the rest of Lorraine, and Nancy in particular, should not be made to suffer as a consequence. 'Dépouiller une région française au profit d'une autre, ce serait une solution bien simpliste, une politique non seulement stérile mais inique et néfaste, contre laquelle nous devrions protester de toutes nos forces'. Nancy feared, more than anything, that the French authorities might see fit to move the town's major institutions to Metz, 'Nos Instituts, nos Facultés, nos grandes Ecoles'. Nancy also questioned the fairness of the proposal (in fact, merely one suggestion among many) to return the *arrondissement* of Briey to the Moselle department with its factories and mines, many of which had only become operational during annexation. 'Mais qu'était cet arrondissement il y a 45 ans, en comparaison de ce qu'il est aujourd'hui... Pourquoi toucher à ce qui existe et qui fonctionne fort bien?... sous prétexte de rendre à l'ancienne Moselle des richesses qui n'ont jamais été siennes'. It

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<sup>34</sup> After all, Metz has repeatedly failed to prevent invading armies from the east reaching Paris. See Roth, François, 'La frontière franco-allemande, 1871-1918', in *Annales de l'est*, no. 1, 1992, pp.35-52, p.36.

<sup>35</sup> Château de Vincennes, 6 N 154.



is hard not to feel a degree of sympathy for the inhabitants of Nancy and the Meurthe-et-Moselle in the light of their demotion caused by the return of the lost provinces.

However, the authors of this address were elected councillors, safeguarding their own positions as much as those of the citizens of Nancy. The main question which arises, however, is what kind of homecoming did this provide for the Moselle? In the light of the bitterness and resentment expressed by the councillors of Nancy with regard to Metz, it is clear that reunification of the Moselle with the rest of Lorraine was to be a far more arduous task than many had predicted. Even Raymond Poincaré's optimistic rallying cry in 1921 could not even begin to paper over the cracks which now set the Moselle and the rest of Lorraine apart, 'Messins, Nancéiens, Barrisiens, Spinaliens, nous sommes tous Français et tous Lorrains... Verdun a été détruite pour Metz reconquis'.<sup>36</sup> Not everyone was convinced.

### *L'espace Sar-Lor-Lux*

In 1918, the Moselle's relations with its immediate neighbours in *la mère patrie* were uneasy to say the least. But what of the ties formed during annexation with the remaining neighbours to the north: the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Saarland? How strong were these connections, what did they involve, and how would they develop following the Moselle's return to French rule? *L'espace Sar-Lor-Lux* (*Region Saar-Lor-Lux*) is the name which has gradually come into use since the Second World War for regions considered to be at the cross-roads of Europe, including the Saarland,

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Bonnefont, *Histoire de la Lorraine*, p.109. Poincaré was born in Bar-le-Duc in the Meuse department of Lorraine in 1860.

Lorraine (primarily the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle but also the other two departments) and Luxembourg.<sup>37</sup>

The *espace Sar-Lor-Lux* is an informal union of regions which scholars increasingly describe as a form of *pays*, a region without clearly defined borders or limits.<sup>38</sup> The links between these three areas arose primarily out of common economic interests, stemming from the development of mining and industry from the late nineteenth century onwards, which created massive movements of cross-border workers (*travailleurs frontaliers*).<sup>39</sup> Even though these regions cannot claim to have inhabited the same national context, they have certainly earned the right to compare notes on shared experiences. For example, over recent centuries all three have suffered numerous changes in sovereignty. The Saarland, or *Saargebiet*, was invaded by France in 1792 and annexed, but then became part of Prussia in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon. Following the Treaty of Versailles the region was administered as a League of Nations territory, its mines controlled by France. It was returned to Germany following a plebiscite in the region in 1935 but again found itself under French administration at the end of the Second World War. It was as late as 1955 that a further plebiscite was held which brought about the region's final return to Germany, stability coming a full ten years after the Moselle and Alsace. Luxembourg, on the other hand, was ruled by the Hapsburgs from the early modern period, as was that part of the Netherlands which was to become Belgium in 1830, but both the Netherlands and Luxembourg were within the Holy Roman Empire until they were annexed by France in the 1790s. In 1815 both territories were given to the king of Holland, but

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<sup>37</sup> See Burtenshaw, D., *Saar-Lorraine. Problem Regions of Europe*, Oxford, 1976.

<sup>38</sup> See Rolland-May, Christiane, *Les espaces géographique flous*, PhD thesis, Metz, 1984.

<sup>39</sup> History conferences and collaborative research projects between the universities of Metz, Nancy, the Saarland, and Luxembourg are increasingly common.



Luxembourg (unlike Belgium) was placed within the German Confederation, and in 1842 Luxembourg joined the Prussian Customs Union. The personal union between Holland and Luxembourg lapsed when a queen succeeded to the throne of Holland, as under Salic law, which still operated in the nineteenth century, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg had to be a man. In 1867 an international treaty recognized Luxembourg as a sovereign, neutral state, and the garrison that Prussia had maintained there since 1815 was withdrawn. However, although Luxembourg ceased to be a member of the German Confederation at that point, it continued to be linked to Germany through a customs union until 1919. At that point, this tiny country of 261,000 inhabitants (half as many as the Moselle), over whom Germany, France, and Belgium felt they could still lay claim, had an uncertain future and a plebiscite was held in order to offer its inhabitants Wilson's policy of self-determination.<sup>40</sup>

For the period examined here, the Moselle continued to find itself economically linked to the Saarland, but changes to the national frontier meant the two regions had to adjust to functioning in two different national contexts. Whilst the Moselle underwent a reversal of the Germanisation process, the Saarland lived more or less as an occupied territory. Differences in politics and administration set these two regions apart, as did the national allegiances of their inhabitants after many centuries of conflict. Although the Saarland was largely controlled by the French in the immediate aftermath of the war, it still considered itself to be part of Germany and French border controls between the regions were maintained, needless to say, encouraging the use of

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<sup>40</sup> This was despite the failure to offer the populations of Alsace-Lorraine such a referendum. Germany was removed from the race by its defeat in the war, leaving French and Belgian options for the people to choose from. See Trausch, Gilbert, 'Le poids de la Lorraine dans la question du Luxembourg: le referendum du 28 septembre 1919', in *Cahiers Lorrains*, first trimester, 1983, pp.85-106.

forged papers and travel documents.<sup>41</sup> However, many of the mines and factories employed Saarlanders who continued to live in the Saarland and cross the border each day to go to work and commercial links also persisted. These two regions had lived for almost half a century as part of one nation. As Roth puts it, 'La frontière était un milieu particulier, très perméable où les échanges étaient constants'.<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, links with Luxembourg were certainly easier in the aftermath of war, in view of the wartime allied connections between Luxembourg and France as a whole. However, Luxembourg turned to Belgium, rather than France, in 1921 in order to form an economic union which was later to develop, with the inclusion of the Netherlands, into the Benelux Economic Union in 1948, the first free-trade area in Europe.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the referendum of 1919 in Luxembourg had shown that 73 per cent of the population was in favour of economic union with France. However, support in France for such a move was weak, and negotiations failed to bring about a union which would have undoubtedly strengthened and encouraged Lorraine at a time when recovery was proving sluggish and problematic.<sup>44</sup> Despite this, both Luxembourg and Belgium, like the Saarland, continued to have economic links with the Moselle through mining and industrial companies, some of which bought up sequestered mines and factories which had previously been under German ownership (many of them part of the Thyssen dynasty).

These kinds of informal relationships in the inter-war period clearly were no substitute for the kind of cultural or sentimental ties which were proving so troublesome between the Moselle and the rest of Lorraine, to say nothing of Alsace.

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<sup>41</sup> See chapter five p.166.

<sup>42</sup> Roth, François, 'Les relations économiques entre la Lorraine et le territoire de la Sarre, 1918-1935', in *Revue d'Allemagne*, October-December, 1993, pp.507-522, p.521.

<sup>43</sup> See Trausch, 'Le poids de la Lorraine', in *Cahiers Lorrains*, first trimester, 1983, pp.85-106, p.104.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter seven *passim*.



Nor did the Saar-Lor-Lux area form an *ensemble économique* with any formal structuring or recognition. Political frontiers constantly hindered any such development. Where they were separated by national borders, customs regulations applied as they did elsewhere. In fact, the Saarland and Luxembourg had never represented anything more to the Moselle than neighbouring regions with similar geographies, industrial bases, and economic interests, which, in times of peace, neatly and logically drew them closer together. Equally, a long-term feature of the *espace Sar-Lor-Lux* is the easy rapport between the regions' populations which have successfully lived side by side over the centuries, in spite of the competing nationalisms which have striven to keep them apart.

### *Borders and identity*

Entre Joeuf (Meurthe-et-Moselle) et Moyeuvre  
(Moselle), pourtant dans la même vallée de l'Orne, entre  
Longwy et Thionville, entre Belfort et Mulhouse, il a  
subsisté longtemps et peut-être peut-on le ressentir  
encore aujourd'hui, une subtile différence  
d'atmosphère.<sup>45</sup>

The ghost of the 1871 Franco-German frontier seems to have lingered between the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle long after the Treaty of Versailles had returned it to its pre-1871 position. Beyond the new, post-war, departmental boundaries of the Moselle, lay the French interior, a land which on the one hand represented, to those who could remember, *la mère patrie*, but which also contained *Français de l'intérieur*, a population with a different self-image, with different experiences, and different

expectations of what the future was to hold. But how did the Moselle's indigenous inhabitants see themselves? What was their self-image? With whom did they identify? And what role did the various frontiers or borders which surround the region play in the creation of an *identité mosellane*?

According to one of the Moselle's most respected historians, Adrien Printz, 'Etre Mosellan n'a jamais été facile. C'était souvent connaître un sort contrecarré par avance, comme par une naissance bâtarde'.<sup>46</sup> But among the 1918 population, who considered themselves to be *mosellan* or *indigène*? The remarkable history of the region, briefly sketched in the previous chapter, has brought numerous ethnic groups to the region and its charm and wealth of natural resources have persuaded many of them to remain. Much of the 'indigenous' population, therefore, is made up, not of truly *vieux Mosellans*, a term which implies a long line of ancestors born and bred in the Moselle, but of individuals who chose to define themselves as *vieux Mosellans*. To define oneself in such terms, however, only became necessary in certain situations, notably upon annexation of the region in 1871 and upon its subsequent *désannexion* in 1918. Yet, by 1918, the definition of an *indigène* was becoming less clear. In the 1870s, the massive movements of population away from the Moselle had reduced the size of the indigenous population, along with power and control over its own affairs. Germanisation, for all its limited success, affected and altered the lives of the region's younger generations with their slow but progressive assimilation into, or acceptance of, German culture and German life. The growing trend of marriages between *indigènes* and German immigrants, which continued beyond the end of annexation, gives one illustration of the extent of this assimilation or acceptance. The problem this created

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<sup>45</sup> Roth, 'La frontière franco-allemand', in *Annales de l'est*, no.1, 1992, pp.35-51, p.51.

<sup>46</sup> Printz, *Les immigrés*, p.2.



for the French authorities can be seen in their attempts to define the ethnicity of individuals through classification of the population, implemented by the arriving French troops in November 1918.<sup>47</sup> This system of classification defined an *indigène* as an inhabitant of the region who had been French prior to 1871, or whose parents had been French before they had been awarded German nationality.

Identifying exactly who was an *indigène* within the 1918 population still reveals very little either about the identity or about the sentiment of these people, a problem neither the German nor the French authorities themselves had much success resolving.<sup>48</sup> In general, it has been assumed that the vast majority of *Mosellans* or *Lorrains* within Alsace-Lorraine remained, throughout their separation from France between 1871 and 1918, unequivocally French compared with Alsatians who were seen to be more culturally and politically ambiguous. This assumption seems to stem from the fact that the Moselle was, until 1871, an integral part of the Lorraine region, which, more than almost any other French region, epitomizes the very essence of being French. Joan of Arc, born in Domrémy-la-Pucelle in the Vosges and canonized in 1920<sup>49</sup>, the Cross of Lorraine, later adopted as the symbol of the French resistance in the Second World War, the *Trois Evêchés* of Toul, Metz, and Verdun, even the wrought iron supplied by the region's mines and factories to construct the Eiffel Tower, have all become regional as well as national symbols of patriotism. Such symbolism evolved despite the suspicion, voiced by many within the region as a whole,

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<sup>47</sup> See chapter five, pp.158-168.

<sup>48</sup> See chapter five, pp.180-187.

<sup>49</sup> The image of Joan of Arc is very flexible as it stood for victory in war as much as for Catholic royalism.

that the French have a tendency to love the image of Lorraine more than they love Lorrainers.<sup>50</sup>

Yet the clarity of the image of Lorraine was superficial. Even in the 1860s, there was little evidence of an *identité lorraine* with strong cultural, linguistic, or social connections between the peoples who made up this sprawling, and rather cumbersome region. As if to draw attention to the disparate nature of the populations of Lorraine, Alsace, just across the Vosges mountains, was turning the concept of identity into something of an art. But automatically attaching or linking the Moselle to the artificial image of Lorraine following *désannexion*, thereby ignoring the changes which had occurred in the intervening years, is unfortunate and misleading. Indeed, the populations in the Francophone sector appear to have remained largely loyal to France. However, there is little evidence to suggest that those to the north of the linguistic frontier felt strongly one way or the other prior to 1871, when efforts to introduce the French language had been met with reactions varying from indifference to outright resentment. Furthermore, where an easily defined *identité lorraine* was not in evidence in the 1860s, the same could also be said for the region which became annexed Lorraine in 1871. Not only was it hard for annexed Lorraine to define itself, but the annexed area did not even correspond to what had been a complete *département* prior to 1870. What occurred during the half century of annexation, therefore, is of crucial importance in understanding the attitudes and expectations of the indigenous population as it was in 1918, teetering on the edge of reunification with France. Few referred to an *identité mosellane* during that period, and *indigènes*

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<sup>50</sup> Maurice Barrès played a key role in reinforcing a romantic image of Lorraine and annexed Lorraine through his novels and writing. For example, his novel, *Colette Baudoche*, tells the story of a young girl living in Metz during the period of German annexation. Barrès, Maurice, *Colette Baudoche*, Paris, 1908. Raymond Poincaré also used his Lorrainer roots to good effect during the initial period



tended to consider themselves *lorrain* rather than *mosellan*. Even then, the fragmentation of the region into smaller communities and groups meant that individuals were often inclined to call on local identities, such as *messine*, and *sarregueminoise*, rather than a more general regional identity.<sup>51</sup> This web of identities is recognized by Anthony Smith who writes,

Regions easily fragment into localities, and localities may easily disintegrate into separate settlements. Only rarely do we meet a powerful and cohesive regional movement, as in the Vendée during the French Revolution... In most other cases 'regionalism' is unable to sustain the mobilization of its populations with their separate grievances and unique problems. Besides, regions are geographically difficult to define; their centres are often multiple and their boundaries ragged.<sup>52</sup>

Smith's comments are entirely relevant to the Moselle with its lack of natural frontiers, its ever changing political borders, and regional centres, from Bitche to Metz, and from Sarrebourg to Thionville. To the fragmentation of identity must be added the constant modification of identity brought about by historical events themselves. It was therefore with an identity which can best be described as slippery that the *Mosellans* returned to France, 'une et indivisible', at the end of the First World War.

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of integration after the war, especially in speeches he made during formal visits and celebratory parades.

<sup>51</sup> Those who considered themselves Alsace-Lorrainer tended to be German immigrants who had settled in the regions. These were, of course, the only members of the regions' populations likely to recognise Alsace-Lorraine as a real, rather than artificial, concept.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, London, 1991, p.4.

### *Concluding remarks*

There is little doubt that in the early stages of integration into France, the Moselle and its population struggled to come to terms with new relationships in both regional and national, contexts, based, as these relationships were, on negative external pressures, rather than on a positive self image. Within the region, the population was divided by culture, language, class, politics, and even geography, as well as by urban, rural and industrial divides. In the end, however, any identity depended upon the pressures of the moment. An inhabitant could call upon national, regional, or local identities. He or she could be French, *Lorrain*, *Mosellan*, or even *Messin*, but never German and certainly not Alsatian. There is nothing unusual in this diversity of identity over a broad spectrum within a small, border region. However, it is the chameleon-like behaviour of identity on this most localized level which blows apart any secure definition of national identity upon which nation states relied so heavily in order to win wars and construct peace.

This chapter has shown that the Moselle was, to a large extent, defined by its immediate neighbours. The purpose of the following chapters is to show what was distinctive about the Moselle in the crucial period, 1919 to 1925, and to examine the historical factors which were to continue shaping the region's identity. The historical, demographic, economic, and geo-political vulnerability of the Moselle is what dictates the structure of the rest of this thesis.



### *Summary*

The geographical context of the Moselle shows a region caught between the identities of numerous regions and countries. In particular, *Le joug alsacien*, the dominance of Alsatians and Strasbourg over *mosellan* affairs, merely created animosity rather than comradeship between those who had shared the experience of annexation. However, tensions between the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle were not much better. A new, 'invisible' border, setting *Mosellans* apart from other Lorrainers, had emerged during their time apart which did not disappear with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Fellow Lorrainers quickly merged with other *Français de l'intérieur* and were viewed as outsiders. In fact, relations among the Moselle, the Saarland, and Luxembourg, based principally on informal economic factors and a cultural compatibility, appear to have been less problematic than other relations in the post-war period. Yet, the outcome of these developments in regional relationships was not to strengthen a pre-existing *identité mosellane*, but to force the region's fragmented indigenous population to call upon an identity which had never really existed before.



## Chapter III

### Armistice, Liberation, and Occupation: 1918



**Figure 1: Plaque commemorating Marshal Foch's entry to Metz, 26 November 1918.<sup>1</sup>**

“Ah! Voir défiler des troupes françaises sur la Place de l'Hôtel de Ville de Metz c'est ma plus belle récompense”. Marshal Foch, with these emotional words, delivered after the official entry of French troops into Metz at the end of the First World War, reflected the sentiments of many thousands of *Mosellans* who welcomed, with open arms, the return of French sovereignty to their region after 47 years of German rule. Yet, even as the armistice was being signed, and the regions' return to France after 47

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<sup>1</sup> This plaque is situated on the wall of the Saint-Etienne Cathedral in Place d'Armes, Metz. Photograph, C. Grohmann.



years of German rule was being effectively sealed, fragmentation of sentiment among the region's inhabitants had already begun. As the reality of a German defeat and Allied victory slowly sank in, only those who found themselves on 'the winning side' could publicly express their emotion. Despair and disbelief had to be nursed in private. This chapter examines the closing months of the First World War when last minute German efforts to retain sovereignty over Alsace-Lorraine took on an air of desperation, and when the threat of the German Revolution hung over the civilian population. This chapter also examines the 'no-man's land' between the armistice and the arrival of Allied troops, as well as the immediate measures taken by the French army command and the first representatives of the French administration to arrive in the region. Was there a cause for celebration during this period? If so, what exactly was being celebrated, and by whom? And how did the new beginning unfold in the Moselle from the point of view of the new administration, as well as of the inhabitants themselves?

### *An autonomous Elsaß-Lothringen?*

As late as September 1918, Germany's leaders finally acknowledged the need to win over the indigenous populations of Alsace and the Moselle, as the *Reich* faced certain defeat and the regions' return to France appeared increasingly likely. A plan was therefore thrown together to grant the *Reichsland* autonomy, putting it on an equal footing with other German regions. By mid-October however, events and opinions within the provinces forced Max von Baden's government to go one step further, to discard autonomism and suggest a neutral state - a buffer zone between France and Germany which would safeguard German economic interests which had been so

carefully developed and nurtured throughout annexation. Loss of the regions' industrial and mining output, as well as the inevitable psychological scarring which would result from a reversal of the Treaty of Frankfurt, were to be avoided at all cost. Germany was not about to relinquish the provinces without a struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Admittedly, Philippe Scheidemann's proposals to the German cabinet on 16th October 1918 for the creation of propaganda favouring neutrality in Alsace-Lorraine came far too late in the day. His plan was to indicate German willingness to grant independence to the regions, and follow this up with a plebiscite. Yet such a plan was transparent both to the regions' populations and to interested nations, such as Switzerland and the United States of America, who saw it for what it was - a last-minute salvage operation. The proposed plebiscite presented three options: German rule, French rule, or neutrality. By the end of October, Germany had put all its resources and attention into neutralist propaganda. Only a matter of days later, to the extreme irritation of the French, tracts, posters, and newspaper articles were circulated, advertising public meetings and advising the population to demand a plebiscite, ironically the very thing they had been denied by Germany 47 years before. Equally ironic is the fact that before and during the war, Germany had fervently resisted calls from the regions' elected representatives and the press to grant the *Reichsland* autonomy over its affairs. In any case, as far as the Moselle was concerned, hardly any of the plebiscite propaganda issued prior to the signing of the armistice reached the region. Perhaps there had not been sufficient time to distribute it

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<sup>2</sup> Adamthwaite argues that in 1917, it was not possible to negotiate peace because, among other things, Germany was still unwilling to relinquish Alsace-Lorraine. And for the French, peace without the return of Alsace-Lorraine was unthinkable. Adamthwaite, Anthony, *Grandeur and Misery. France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940*, London, 1995, p.38.



beyond Strasbourg and Colmar. Perhaps the authorities saw no point in distributing it in what they perceived to be 'Francophile' Moselle.

As events gathered momentum, Germany's chances of success with an eleventh-hour 'liberation' of the provinces faded. On 21 October the mayor of Strasbourg, an Alsatian, Rudolf Schwander, was appointed *Statthalter*, whilst Karl Hauss, also an Alsatian, became his prime minister.<sup>3</sup> The appointment, for the first time, of Alsatians to these high-ranking posts was merely a token gesture from the German authorities, who had treated the Alsatian people as second class citizens for the duration of annexation. Nonetheless, Schwander was given a free hand to propose numerous radical measures in order to draw in support from the population's representatives in the regional parliament: these included an amnesty for all political offences, an end to military interference in civilian affairs, the lifting of censorship of the press and post. However, even Schwander quickly realized that he was fighting a losing battle, later admitting that from that moment on, the political future of Alsace-Lorraine was exclusively in Wilson's hands.<sup>4</sup> Of his fourteen points, the eighth referred to the provinces, and stated that the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 with regard to Alsace-Lorraine, should be righted.<sup>5</sup> Schwander failed to rally any significant support behind the German government's offers among Alsatian, let alone *Mosellan*, deputies. For the latter, neither autonomism nor the creation of a neutral state on Alsatian terms was appealing. As Germans living in the region began to sell

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<sup>3</sup> Both Schwander and Hauss were deputies in the regional parliament for Alsace-Lorraine created in 1911. At the end of the war, they had little choice but to leave Alsace and opt for 'voluntary repatriation' to Germany because of what was seen as their collaboration with the German authorities. See Igersheim, François, *L'Alsace des notables (1870-1914). La bourgeoisie et le peuple alsacien*, Strasbourg, 1981, pp.258 & 292.

<sup>4</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.644.

<sup>5</sup> Baechler, Christian, 'L'Alsace-Lorraine dans les relations franco-allemandes de 1918 à 1933', in Bariéty, J., Guth, A., Valentin, J. M., *La France et l'Allemagne entre les deux guerres mondiales*, Nancy, 1987, pp.69-109, p.70.

their property and leave, it was clear that the *Reich's* days of sovereignty over its *Reichsland* were over. The newspaper *Le Messin - Le Lorrain - Le Courrier* pointed out,

A Berlin, après le remplacement du comte de Hertling  
par le prince Max de Bade, on songea enfin à doner [sic]  
plus de liberté à l'Alsace-Lorraine. Il était trop tard.  
L'autonomie *in extremis* qu'on accorda aux provinces  
annexées ne pouvait plus avoir aucune influence sur les  
sentiments de la population.<sup>6</sup>

Such outright rejection of German influence in the provinces was a reflection of Germany's tarnished image, the insincerity of its plans to award the regions autonomy plain for all to see, including Scheidemann himself.<sup>7</sup> Even a mischievous rumour, one of many at that time, suggesting that the French Government had been toppled by French revolutionaries forcing Clemenceau, his Cabinet, and Marshal Foch to flee (if they had not already been assassinated), failed to impress the Moselle's inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> By the autumn of 1918, there was a general feeling that Alsace-Lorraine had turned the page, leaving German rule behind whilst tentatively waiting to see what the future held within a French context.

### *A passing phase: Revolution and Republic*

It is often forgotten that Alsace-Lorraine, still part of the German *Reich* in early November 1918, witnessed the 'muted echo' of the socialist revolution which swept

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<sup>6</sup> 'Les derniers jours du régime allemand à Metz et en Alsace-Lorraine', in *Le Messin - Le Lorrain - le Courrier*, 19 November 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.654.

<sup>8</sup> 'Les derniers jours du régime allemand', in *Le Messin - Le Lorrain - le Courrier*, 19 November 1918.



across Germany.<sup>9</sup> Few sources remain of those days when soviet-style councils were set up by soldiers and workers. In the Moselle, on the night of 8th November, a number of delegates from the Soldiers Council in Cologne, as well as sailors from Kiel, disembarked at Metz station. Revolutionary committees were then created over the next few days, mainly in the Germanophone towns of Sarrebourg, Sarreguemines, Forbach, Saint Avold, and Hayange. Activity was also in evidence in industrial areas, for example around Knutange, and a *mosellan* marine presided over the workers' council of Thionville.<sup>10</sup> The Revolution, which had its greatest effect in Strasbourg, certainly lacked the force or impact of its Russian equivalent. According to Rossé, the astonished population watched in disbelief, finding it hard to take the Revolution too seriously.<sup>11</sup> Anticipating the fall of the German Empire, they had expected something rather more dramatic. Instead, as Rossé put it, 'Den Zusammenbruch des Reiches und der Militärdiktatur hatten sie unter sensationelleren Umständen erwartet. Nun rieselte das ganze Riesengebaude, das für Jahrhunderte errichtet schien, wie ein Haus aus Sand.'<sup>12</sup>

One of the first revolutionary posters to appear stated, 'An die Bürger und Soldaten der Stadt Metz. Ruhe ist die erste Bürger- und Soldatenpflicht. Plünderungen werden mit dem Tode bestraft'.<sup>13</sup> However, it was often the

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<sup>9</sup> See Smith, 'From the *Reich* to the Republic', in *France: Nation and Republic*, Kelly, M. Böck, R., eds. See also Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, which gives a more detailed account of revolutionary events but again covers mainly Alsace.

<sup>10</sup> Roth, François, 'Metz et la Moselle au lendemain de la première guerre mondiale', in *Cahier du Cercle Jean Macé*, No. 31, 1990, no page numbers.

<sup>11</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p. 490.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Author's translation: 'With the fall of the German *Reich* and military dictatorship, they had expected something more dramatic. Instead, this giant structure, which had been erected to last for centuries, crumbled like a sand-castle.'

<sup>13</sup> A. Bellard, 'Comment, en 1918, Metz a rompu ses chaînes (la mission Houpert-Christmann)', in *Mémoires de l'Académie Nationale de Metz*, Nancy, 1956 (no page numbers). Author's translation: 'To the Citizens and Soldiers of the City of Metz. Calm is the priority for citizens and soldiers. Looting is punishable by death.'

revolutionaries themselves who were guilty of disturbing the peace, by antagonising the population with sporadic looting, petty crime, and generally boisterous behaviour. More positively, the Councils set up commissions to deal with ensuring the food supply, bread rationing, public transport, the demobilisation of soldiers, and the release of political prisoners. They also brought an end to martial law, and the wartime restrictions on the indigenous population. Despite the fact that during the last months of the war there had been fewer arrests by German military authorities and a general relaxation of martial law, these measures came as an enormous relief to the inhabitants of the regions, in particular to the Moselle's Francophone population which had been forbidden to use French in public for the duration of the war.<sup>14</sup>

In Strasbourg, on the same day as the armistice was signed, a red flag was hung by the revolutionaries marking the creation of the Republic. A red flag was also hung from the *Hôtel de Ville* in Metz, and any soldiers sent by their commanding officers to suppress the rebellious activity simply joined with the revolutionaries, tying red ribbons to their buttonholes and flamboyantly tossing aside their weapons, fittingly, in the Place d'Armes in Metz. The revolutionary movement had little or no communication with, or control over, those soldiers still fighting at the front who only became aware of the Revolution once the withdrawal began. It was only those on leave and residing in barracks around Metz or those in transit, therefore, who were in a position to defy their officers and join the 'rebels'.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere in the Moselle, industrial workers, in particular those who were German immigrants, added strength to the socialist movement and a series of strikes was called in factories and mines. In fact, the

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<sup>14</sup> 'Les derniers jours du régime allemand', in *Le Messin - Le Lorrain - le Courrier*, 19 November 1918.

<sup>15</sup> See chapter six, p.215. K's diary describes how one officer was terrified to travel to Metz as he feared being attacked by his own soldiers.



workers' councils were to remain in the region long after the soldiers had been forced to withdraw under the terms of the armistice, causing the incoming military and civilian authorities some considerable problems over the months which followed.<sup>16</sup>

According to André Bellard, writing in 1955 about the Revolution in Metz, 'l'autorité normale, on le voit, n'a pas perdu la tête; la Révolution de 1918 glisse sur ce monde alsacien-lorrain comme l'eau sur les plumes d'un canard.'<sup>17</sup> But despite this relative calm, another symbolic event was simultaneously unfolding - the creation of the National Assembly of Alsace-Lorraine. The elected representatives of the *Landtag*, the regional parliament set up by Germany upon the granting of a constitution to the regions in 1911, announced on 9 November the transformation of the *Landtag* into a National Assembly, taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the imminent German defeat to create an independent administration. Dr Eugène Ricklin,<sup>18</sup> hitherto president of the lower chamber of the *Landtag*, was nominated President of the National Assembly and, in a chamber otherwise dominated by Alsatians, Nicolas Jung, leader of the *Parti Lorrain*, became head of finances.

On 10 November, having recognized the hopelessness of the situation they faced, Schwander and Hauss sent letters of resignation to Chancellor Friedrich Ebert, leader of the new German Government in Berlin, leaving Alsace-Lorraine in the hands of the National Assembly and the Revolutionary Councils. But, despite the confusion

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter seven, p.260-271.

<sup>17</sup> Bellard, 'Comment, en 1918, Metz a rompu ses chaînes', in *Mémoires de l'Académie Nationale de Metz*, Nancy, 1956 (no page numbers). Again, K's diary confirms this point and shows how the indigenous population appeared almost as on-lookers as discipline in the German army disintegrated around them. See chapter six, p.215.

<sup>18</sup> Ricklin, an Alsatian, enjoyed a successful political career under the German regime but was expelled to Germany by the French in 1919. He was able to return to the region the following year and played a leading role in the Alsatian autonomist movement. He was one of the accused in the infamous trial of 1928 of Alsatian autonomists. See Igersheim, François, *L'Alsace des notables*, p.284.

of governments all vying for control of the provinces' future, there was no undignified rush to seize power. The Assembly considered its role during the period between the signing of the Armistice and the entry of French troops to be no more than transitional, maintaining public order and providing essential supplies and services. This they achieved by instructing all civil servants to remain at their posts, which, it seems, the majority of them did. There were divisions among the deputies, though, within the Assembly. Dr Ricklin and Charles Didio headed those who considered it the Assembly's duty to seek a return to French rule by negotiating guarantees from the French Government for the safeguarding of Alsace-Lorraine's traditions and culture. The second group, lead by Nicolas Delsor and Joseph Pfleger, sought an unconditional return to France with full integration into *la mère patrie*. They believed it was their duty to ensure 'La rentrée de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine dans le droit, leur attachement à la France indiscutable et définitif'.<sup>19</sup> The remaining deputies were undecided. Ultimately, it was the second of the three groups which achieved its goal, for the simple reason that, as the French military swept into Alsace-Lorraine, the newly formed Assembly was almost completely ignored.

Meanwhile, the revolutionaries, although successfully pulling on board soldiers and workers around the regions, were having a good deal less success with the civilian population. Admittedly, the Councils worked hand in hand with the National Assembly during that crucial period following the armistice when, above all else, what was required was peace and stability. Some socialist deputies in the National Assembly also sat on the Councils, which encouraged the two to work together.

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<sup>19</sup> Declaration made by the Assembly 5 December 1918 at its final meeting, quoted in Redslob, Robert, 'Le changement du régime en Alsace-Lorraine après la défaite allemande', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, No. 104, 1920, pp.387-399, p.392. Redslob was a Professor of Law at the University of Strasbourg.



However, the Central Revolutionary Council in Strasbourg, whilst not neglecting its main objective, the promotion of international socialism, failed to bring on board many of the region's inhabitants. By the time French troops entered the provinces, the relevance of international socialism, as well as that of the national assembly, was negligible. With the exception of a number of industrial 'hot spots', the withdrawal of German troops marked the end of revolutionary activity in Alsace-Lorraine, as well as the end of the 'transitional government', and its imagined role in the future running of the region.

As far as the civilian population of the Moselle was concerned, news of the imminent German defeat eventually filtered through. Censorship of the press during most of the war, had severely limited the flow of reliable news. However, during the summer of 1918, military developments had been reported in the Swiss press, notably the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, some copies of which had found their way to the reading room of the Municipal Council in Metz.<sup>20</sup> Reaction to the news was varied. Many, though by no means all, German immigrants had already begun leaving, anticipating the application of Wilson's fourteen points and a return to French rule. The Francophile population, on the other hand, had quickly begun preparing for the arrival of French troops. Yet, for others among the indigenous population, a French future held many potential hazards, including the suppression of local dialects and changes to the region's religious statute. Some believed French leaders' promises to respect the culture and traditions of the indigenous population and, optimistic of a French accommodation of the regions' particular laws, traditions, and culture, also began festive preparations. Others, less bound by political or national sentiment, clearly

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<sup>20</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.642.

chose to play a game of 'wait and see' in the knowledge that *Mosellans* and Alsatians had never been masters of their own destiny. Sentiment within the Moselle's native population, however, was mixed, and was to remain that way through the turbulent years which followed.

### *Armistice, liberation, and occupation*

At 5p.m. French time on 11 November 1918 an armistice agreement was signed at Compiègne, bringing to an end the First World War. The agreement instructed Germany to withdraw all its troops from Belgium, Luxembourg, France, as well as Alsace-Lorraine, by 26 November. Following on the heels of the retreating German soldiers, France was able to make its long-awaited entry into its lost provinces, achieving, by its way of it, the 'liberation' of the regions after 47 years of injustice, paving the way for the 'reintegration' of their populations into the French nation. Despite French views on the matter, the entry of troops into the regions did, in fact, mark the beginning of a military occupation by France, which was to last until the ratification of the peace treaty over a year later. Until that date, France was bound by international law, set out at the Second Conference at the Hague, which stated that occupation of an enemy territory permits the occupying force to act according to the necessities of war. Once these necessities are dealt with, the existing laws in the occupied territory must remain intact until a peace treaty is agreed.

The withdrawal of German troops began immediately the armistice was announced. The German Chief of General Staffs, Freiherrn von Obberhausen stated,

...Bewegten Herzens trennen wir uns von diesem

schönen, bisher deutschen Lande, das auch so vielen



anderen Deutschen eine neue Heimat geworden war.

Aber, Kamaraden, es gibt sich mit Würde in das

Unvermeidliche zu fügen. Lasst uns dieses Land so

herausgeben, wie wir einen lieb gewordenen Privatbesitz

abgeben wurden. Lasst uns keine Zerstörungen daran

vornehmen! Vergesst nicht die alte deutsche

Manneszucht beim Abzug aus dem Lande. Begegnet der

Bevölkerung des Elsaß mit Achtung, unterlasst alle

Krankungen!<sup>21</sup>

It was a slow and miserable procession of defeated soldiers which passed through the Moselle, some of them buoyed up by revolutionary events of the previous few days. But the majority were exhausted by the fighting, defeat, and lack of food. From the region of Verdun poured thousands of bedraggled German troops heading for the German frontier, now to the north and east of the Moselle and Alsace, passing through Moulins and Metz on their way.<sup>22</sup> Many defiantly wore red ribbons in their buttonholes. André Bellard cites Albert Houpert who witnessed the disorderly retreat, “les troupes de l’arrière et du service des étapes faisaient franchement une mauvaise impression: leur tenue était débraillée, les soldats ne saluaient pas ou saluaient très mal leurs supérieurs; aux voitures pendaient des loques rouges”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.501. Author’s translation: ‘It is with a heavy heart that we leave this beautiful and, hitherto German, land which has also been a home to so many other Germans. But, comrades, we must accept the inevitable. Let us hand over this land as if it were a cherished home. Let us refrain from destroying it! Do not forget your old German breeding as you retreat! Treat the population of Alsace with respect and bear no grudges!’.

<sup>22</sup> Even those among the local population, impatiently awaiting the arrival of French troops, felt some sympathy for the young German soldiers.

<sup>23</sup> Bellard, ‘Comment, en 1918 Metz a rompu ses chaînes’, in *Mémoires de l’Académie Nationale de Metz*, Nancy, 1956 (no page numbers).

The entry of French troops into towns in the Moselle occurred, in some cases, a matter of hours after the Germans had vacated their posts and barracks. The Mayor of Boulay's hand-written report of 25th November 1918 was proudly entitled, 'Rapport No.1 du maire au commissaire de la République à Metz'. The report began,

Le 19 novembre à quatre heures de l'après midi les  
dernières troupes allemandes quittaient Boulay. A peine  
étaient-elles sorties de nos murs, que les drapeaux  
français, précieusement cachés jusqu'alors - on craignait  
une vengeance allemande quelconque - sortirent comme  
par enchantement.<sup>24</sup>

The mayor's report was one of many sent to the Republic's commissioner in Metz, Léon Mirman, which transmitted accounts of the undoubtedly heart-felt joy of a 'population enthousiasmée', celebrating the departure of Germany's spent military force as much as the prospect of welcoming French troops to their towns and villages. It took some days before the whole of the Moselle had been evacuated allowing allied forces to enter.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, some impatient mayors even sent letters complaining that their towns had not been properly 'liberated' by French soldiers. And Marshal Pétain's triumphant entry, leading the 10th Army into Metz on 19 December, riding in on a white stallion, must have been a stirring sight, if only for the Francophile sections of the population.<sup>26</sup>

Other reports from around the region, on a more practical level, called for reinforcements to help deal with what remained of workers' councils in industrial

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<sup>24</sup> ADM, 301 M 88.

<sup>25</sup> Allied forces carried out this task, and, in the case of the Moselle, they were made up largely of American and French soldiers.

<sup>26</sup> Pétain's entry into Metz had, in fact, been delayed due to an unfortunately timed riding accident.



areas. A letter from the de Wendel company to the *haut commissaire* in Strasbourg, Georges Maringer, demanded that troops be permanently stationed at Hayange and Moyeuvre in order to dissolve the workers' councils, which had been formed by the *Soldatenrat* in Thionville. The letter stated that only American troops had been temporarily posted in Moyeuvre, and that *gendarmes* had not yet arrived. Without a sufficient army presence, a return to work could not be guaranteed.

Il est urgent d'établir un poste à Moyeuvre et d'en  
maintenir un à Hayange pour pouvoir dissoudre les  
Comités ouvriers qui ont été formés par le Soldatenrat de  
Thionville.<sup>27</sup>

This letter is one of a number which illustrate that the tasks facing French troops arriving in the Moselle went beyond simple celebration parades and that the region had first to be properly secured. The military were the first to encounter the complexities of the multi-ethnic population in the region. Only certain sections of that population were prepared to take to the streets with tricolours, secreted away since 1871. A very sizeable immigrant population, not all of whom were factory workers or miners (or German, for that matter), greeted events with nervousness and uncertainty.

On 28 November 1918, Marshal Foch sent a telegram, the telegram paper still bearing the title 'Telegraphie des Deutschen Reichs', to Mirman in Metz (see Figure 2). It stated that the anarchy which had accompanied the departure of German troops, as well as the difficulties of maintaining supplies to the metal industries in the regions, had fostered agitation in industrial areas.<sup>28</sup> Sufficient troops were therefore required particularly in the region around Thionville. Clearly, French army officials believed the

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<sup>27</sup> ADM, 301 M 74. Letter of 25 November 1918 sent from Joeuf, Meurthe-et-Moselle.

<sup>28</sup> ADM, 301 M 74.

Germans had deliberately left behind well organized soviet-style councils in industrial centres in the Moselle. 'Le but poursuivi serait, grâce à une propagande savamment

<p>068</p> <p>Telegramm Nr. 101</p> <p>Empfänger des Telegramms</p> <p>am 10. Nov. 1918</p> <p>von Metz</p> <p>durch</p>	<p>dem Baron a mission chaumont pour General pershing (pour execution commissaire de la republique metz ) Metz</p> <p>Telegraphie des Deutschen Reichs.</p> <p>Ant Metz</p> <p>Reitung Nr.</p>	<p><i>Mirman</i></p> <p><i>Juste</i></p>
<p>Telegramm aus 4 Off Metz de Baron 392 126 28 23 h 40 M. den 29. Nov. 1918</p>		
<p>..no 7192 .. le commissaire de la republique metz a signale qu'une certaine agitation s'est produite dans centres ouvriers a la suite du mouvement anarchique qui a accompagne en alsace lorraine le depart des troupes allemandes et en raison difficultes du ravitaillement des usines metallurgiques notamment dans region ouest -- thionville stop -- Le vous demande de vouloir bien mettre sans retard en relation avec commis- saire de la republique a metz et de donner satisfaction aux demandes qu'il adresserait en vue de faire stationner dans .. region ouest thionville troupes americaines destinees a assurer maintien de l'ordre -- signe Foch .., CE 7192 ..</p> <p><i>29/11/18</i></p>		

Figure 2: Telegram from Marshal Foch to Mirman, 29 November 1918.<sup>1</sup>

organisée, de contaminer l'Armée Française et de provoquer la Révolution en France dans un delai de trois mois'. As Foch went on to show, of equal concern to the French army were the presence and attitudes of the many American soldiers present in the Moselle immediately following the armistice. They appeared either to find it difficult to distinguish between *indigènes* and Germans, or were more inclined to be friendly to

<sup>1</sup> ADM, 301 M 74.



those Germans they encountered than the French would have liked. A *Note* marked secret from *Chef d'état major* Baille noted,

La section de la population Lorraine au contact des troupes américaines serait vivement impressionnée par les bruits colportés par des soldats et même des Officiers américains et relatifs à la possibilité d'un plébiscite pour trancher la question d'Alsace-Lorraine au moment de la paix.<sup>30</sup>

The question of a plebiscite was indeed highly sensitive for the French authorities. Having spent considerable time during the war persuading their allied partners to agree to the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, they had also been extremely careful to deny any need for a plebiscite. Wilson, Lloyd George, and even the Pope, had, at various stages during the war, voiced their concerns about Alsace-Lorraine's future sovereignty. The French feared that support in Switzerland and the United States for a plebiscite was growing. This was thanks to an enthusiastic propaganda campaign, fought internationally by the regions' autonomists, demanding that Alsace-Lorrainers be granted the right to be masters of their own destiny.<sup>31</sup> What France now had to contend with was a sudden surge in autonomist propaganda, emanating, they claimed, from German sources, and also calling for a plebiscite.

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<sup>30</sup> ADM, 301 M 74.

<sup>31</sup> Poor translations of autonomist tracts were distributed in the United States, Switzerland, and Great Britain and were signed Ley, Muth, and Rapp, three Alsatian autonomists. However, in the atmosphere of 'self-determination' in the immediate post-war period, those lobbying for a plebiscite received more press coverage than the French authorities might have hoped. However, France had also fought an enthusiastic international propaganda campaign during the war years to bolster support for French sovereignty in the regions. For example, a lecture given by Whitney Warren (member of the *Institut de France*) at the Aeolian Hall in New York on 14 March 1917, presented a passionate case for the swift and unquestioned return of the provinces to France. PRO, FO 395/175.

The French had formed their case against a plebiscite on the following grounds. Firstly, what France had sought to gain from Germany's defeat in November 1918, was the return of its lost provinces. Their integration into France amounted to *désannexion*, which, as Wilson's eighth point in the armistice stated, undid the wrong committed by Germany 47 years previously.<sup>32</sup> There had been no plebiscite in 1871 and so there should be no plebiscite in 1918, as France was merely annulling the Treaty of Frankfurt. Secondly, the French regarded the protest of Alsace-Lorraine at the National Assembly of Bordeaux, delivered 17 February 1871, as plebiscite enough. That protest had stated,

L'Alsace et Lorraine ne veulent pas être aliénées... Tous  
unanimement, les citoyens demeurés dans leurs foyers,  
comme les soldats accourus sous les drapeaux, les uns en  
votant, les autres en combattant, signifient à l'Allemagne  
et au monde l'immuable volonté de l'Alsace et de la  
Lorraine de rester françaises.<sup>33</sup>

This statement, the French claimed, had been made by deputies elected by the people of Alsace and the part of Lorraine, which was about to be annexed and therefore was a true reflection of their will. The French authorities were also quick to use the celebrations in the provinces in November and December 1918 which greeted the French army, as further proof of the populations' desire to be returned to France. In fact, the magnitude of these celebrations was even greater than the French had expected, thus enabling the likes of Robert Redslob to dismiss calls for a plebiscite.

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<sup>32</sup> Baechler, Christian, 'L'Alsace-Lorraine dans les relations franco-allemandes', in Bariéty, J., Guth, A., Valentin, J. M., *La France et l'Allemagne entre les deux guerres mondiales*, Nancy, 1987, pp.69-109, p.70.

<sup>33</sup> The entire text of this protest can be found in, Jean, Jean-Pierre, *Le livre d'or du Souvenir Français*, Metz, 1929, pp.398-402.



Le plébiscite était fait par des sacrifices de 50 années. Il a été fait par les parents qui ont envoyé leurs fils à la France et qui ont ainsi détruit la vie familiale de leurs propres mains. [...] Le plébiscite n'a pas duré un jour, il a duré cinquante ans. Il n'a pas été fait par un suffrage, il a été fait par des larmes."<sup>34</sup>

Redslob went one step further and argued that a plebiscite itself was, in fact, a most unreliable way of establishing the will of the people. Circumstances at the end of the war, including, 'difficultés de la vie faussement attribuées au gouvernement nouveau, des impatiences, des déceptions causées par une vision trop belle du régime à venir, la tendance à embellir le passé',<sup>35</sup> meant simply that the people of Alsace-Lorraine were not in a position to know their own minds or to vote reliably in a plebiscite. Patronising though Redslob's comments are, he accurately put his finger on the problem of inflated expectations from which both France and the returned provinces were to suffer throughout the early period of integration. In fact, the same argument of inflated expectations was used by *Français de l'intérieur* who sought to gloss over their own unskilful handling of the integration process in the first few weeks and months and which quickly produced what became known as the *malaise lorrain*.

Those in favour of a plebiscite also presented three simple arguments. Firstly, the denial of a plebiscite in 1871 was no reason to deny one in what were very different circumstances, 47 years on. Secondly, Alsace-Lorraine had a right to self-determination like any other state or territory in 1918. Finally, Alsace-Lorraine had

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<sup>34</sup> Redslob, 'Le changement du régime', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, No. 104, 1920, pp.387-399, p.399.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

been a pawn in French and German war games for long enough. From an Alsatian viewpoint, the creation of a neutral buffer state could partially solve the problem of competing nationalisms in the region, something a plebiscite could offer as an option. But the truth of the matter was, of course, that France could not trust such an ethnically and politically mixed population with such diverging views on the subject of its future sovereignty. In the event of a plebiscite, French politicians felt they could not risk failing to achieve the resounding support needed to maintain the myth which had emerged through *revanchism* since the 1870s, and which had been all but written in stone by the French government during the war. They had claimed for too long, it seemed, that Alsatians and *Mosellans* were staunch French patriots patiently awaiting their deliverance from German dominance. That a plebiscite might expose a less than patriotic population, was too great a risk to take.

Yet, what wisdom was there in France resisting so vigorously the possibility of a plebiscite, risking in the process its credibility in the eyes of its wartime allies? Was it really the case that a plebiscite might not go in favour of France as some feared? Undoubtedly, any vote had the potential of being very close indeed, especially if, as some people proposed, the ballot paper presented three options: French rule, German rule, or a neutral state. However, it is very unlikely that German immigrants would have been allowed to vote in a plebiscite on the future of Alsace-Lorraine, thereby limiting considerably the damage to French credibility. Timing was another important factor. If a vote had taken place immediately after the signing of the armistice, it is fairly certain that France would have won more than enough support as Germany's poor treatment of the indigenous population was still fresh in their minds and disillusionment with the new French administration had not yet taken hold. As it was,



there would have been no way of telling if the result from a plebiscite represented a vote of confidence in a future French administration or a vote of no confidence in the outgoing German administration. In any event, France was taking no risks and it was the role of the now occupying French military forces to quash all calls for plebiscites, to suppress all pro-German activity, and to begin the process of creating French sentiment in two provinces whose populations had little or no idea what it was to be French in the Third French Republic.

### *Cause for Celebration?*

A sense of jubilation and overwhelming excitement infected the Moselle's indigenous population as their 'liberation' day drew close. Committees had been set up by the National Assembly, as well as by local municipal councils, to organize the official celebrations to welcome the French troops, negotiating with the French authorities where possible, how and when they would take place. Many of the accounts of the days leading up to and including their arrival describe feverish preparations to mark this most momentous occasion. Bellard describes how the streets were adorned with tricolours, 'la plupart humbles emblèmes de circonstance faits hâtivement des tissus les plus inattendus, mais quelquefois reliques pâlées par le temps, soigneusement conservées depuis 1870'.<sup>36</sup> François Reitel shows how it was the responsibility of municipalities around the region to pay for the street decorations to welcome the French troops. In Montigny-lès-Metz, the sum of 750 francs was set aside for the purpose.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bellard, 'Comment, en 1918 Metz a rompu ses chaînes', in *Mémoires de l'Académie Nationale de Metz*, Nancy, 1956 (no page numbers). K's diary also notes that in the final days before the arrival of French troops, it was almost impossible to find blue material in Metz, so much having been used up making *tricolors*. See chapter six, p.215.

<sup>37</sup> Reitel, *Montigny-lès-Metz*, p.338.



The arrival of French generals and their armies was celebrated around the region during the days and nights from 17 to 23 November.<sup>38</sup> Picture postcards were printed in their thousands of the scenes. One in particular shows of a long line of local girls entitled, 'La Délivrance de Metz, 18 novembre 1918'.<sup>39</sup> Another postcard, reproduced below, captured a moment of great excitement for the Francophone population and shows the first delivery of French newspapers to Metz since they were banned in 1914.



**Figure 3: Postcard showing the delivery of the first French-language newspapers to Metz, November 1918.**<sup>40</sup>

Postcards were also printed showing the damage to German monuments around Metz, monuments which had been felled like trees and which soon became symbols of

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Rohr gives a detailed chronology of the liberation of the Moselle's major towns and the generals present at each ceremony. Rohr, *La Lorraine Mosellane*, p.2.

<sup>39</sup> See Berrar, Jean-Claude, *Mémoire en images: Metz*, Joué-lès-Tours, 1996, pp.109-114.

<sup>40</sup> Postcard courtesy of K's sister.



revenge, a backdrop for celebrating *Messins*.<sup>41</sup> Plaques and bits of stone were broken off and taken home as souvenirs.<sup>42</sup> Another postcard had the title, 'Metz - le cortège passant devant la Statue renversée de Frédéric Guillaume I'. To the great amusement of many *indigènes*, the moustache of Saint Daniel's statue, part of the entrance to the St Etienne Cathedral in Metz, which had been sculpted to resemble Kaiser Wilhelm II, had been 'shaved off' with the help of a hammer and chisel.

Maurice Barrès's description of the return of his beloved Metz to France, written on Tuesday 19 November, also captures the atmosphere.

Metz, ce soir et toute la nuit, tandis que j'écris ces lignes,  
est pleine de clameurs françaises et de "Marseillaises"  
unanimes. Un des grands jours mosellans s'achève, un  
jour qui nous sature de joie au point que notre coeur se  
découvre insuffisant à contenir cette surabondance.

Nous sommes débordés par l'allégresse et la gratitude.<sup>43</sup>

The culmination of these celebrations came with the first official visit by French dignitaries on 8 December 1918. This was a carefully orchestrated tour of the newly returned provinces by Poincaré, Clemenceau, Foch and a multitude of international high-ranking officials including the British, Italian, and United States ambassadors. By this stage, the street names in Metz had been changed back to their French equivalents of pre-1871, and, in the German quarter, the French Republic and its leaders were

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<sup>41</sup> Pictures and postcards of these scenes can be found in the private papers of the *chanoine* François Cuny, ADM, 18 J 95.

<sup>42</sup> See Maas, 'Zeitenwende in Elsaß-Lothringen' in Speitkamp, Winfried, ed., *Denkmalsturz*, Gottingen, 1997, pp.79-108. This article looks in great detail at the destruction of German monuments in Metz. It links this to the myth of Alsace-Lorraine, examines the motives behind their destruction, and analyses the French administration's 'policy' towards regional monuments in the light of its own propaganda during the years which followed.

<sup>43</sup> Maurice Barres, *La Lorraine dévastée*, Paris, 1919, p.168-169.

honoured as streets and squares were named after them. For example, Kaiser Wilhelm-Ring was renamed Avenue Maréchal Foch. Documents in the municipal archives in St Avoird include letters from dignitaries thanking the people of the town for honouring them in this way.<sup>44</sup> The politicians and their entourage also visited Strasbourg and Colmar on 9 and 10 December and an extremely lavish official book was published commemorating this three-day visit.<sup>45</sup>

Some celebrations were inevitably less visually spectacular than the bunting and flags displayed in Metz. Others were clearly more restrained, their rural populations less demonstrative perhaps, their municipal funds more limited. Yet for those involved, the sentiments expressed were no less heart-felt or genuine. The mayor of Bitche, for example, in March 1871, had presented a flag made by the women of the town to Lieutenant-Colonel Bousquet of the French army who declared, 'Je vous jure que nous rapporterons un jour ce drapeau, dût-il ne rester qu'un seul homme pour l'accompagner.' On 5 January 1919, the flag was duly returned to the town hall of Bitche accompanied by an impressive array of French army officials.<sup>46</sup>

It is undeniable that during those days, the sense of joy and emotion was in no way staged or exaggerated purely for the purposes of French propaganda. Pierri Zind's criticism of French tactics seems rather too harsh when all is considered. He claimed French generals, in an effort to seduce the weary population of Alsace-Lorraine, sent troops to the region who were well rested, in smart new uniforms, ready for the processions and celebration balls held in honour of the liberation. Although his

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<sup>44</sup> Archives municipales de St Avoird, 1H1.

<sup>45</sup> René Weiss, *Le Premier Voyage officiel en Alsace-Lorraine Française 8, 9, 10 Décembre 1918*, Paris, 1919. Copy held in the BN in Paris.

<sup>46</sup> Rohr, *La Lorraine Mosellane*, p.3.



scepticism of French intentions is by no means misplaced, such tactics were only to be expected in view of what was at stake. In fact, Alsace-Lorrainers had a great deal to celebrate in November 1918, with or without the arrival of plump French soldiers seeking to make a good impression. The more appropriate question to ask, therefore, is *what* was being celebrated during those days of tricolours and patriotic parades?

Any interpretation of the celebrations in the Moselle in November and December 1918 depends very much on which version of events prior to and during the First World War is accepted. Broadly speaking, there are two versions to be considered. The first is regarded by many as the myth of Alsace-Lorraine, created by the French government with the assistance of certain Alsatian and Lorrainer *émigrés* living in France after the annexation. It depicts a region, annexed against its will in 1871, whose indigenous population resisted both passively and actively a policy of brutal Germanisation. This lasted until the liberation by French troops in 1918, returning the relieved and overjoyed populations to *la mère patrie*. This version was based on revanchist theories, and a revanchist movement which was at its peak in the 1880s and 1890s in France. From this, wartime propaganda was produced by the French Government in order to rally the French population behind the war effort. For example, Albert Bettannier's drawing entitled, 'La conquête de la Lorraine', depicts a group of *mosellan* women and children, some in traditional costume, hard at work with their laundry. Through the open window, against a rural setting, three German soldiers in Prussian helmets present a posy of flowers to the women. However, the women are poised in various positions which imply their desire to fend off German attentions.

One holds a broom, another an iron, whilst two women appear ready to tip a basin of water over the soldiers' heads.<sup>47</sup>

The French version of how annexation unfolded in the provinces also had another aspect to it. On the one hand, the French had succeeded, by 1918, in convincing the French population that the regions had been worth fighting for, that the inhabitants were 'more French than the French', impatiently awaiting a return to full French sovereignty. On the other, they succeeded in convincing the indigenous population of Alsace and the Moselle that a return to France would be accompanied by a sincere respect for the regions' traditions and cultures. After all, the French had, on numerous occasions throughout the war, promised just such an outcome. In the Moselle, it was General Mangin who promised that 'vos familles, vos biens seront protégés; vos institutions, vos traditions seront respectées'.<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere, General Joffre had promised, 'La France vous apporte ... le respect de vos libertés à vous, des libertés alsaciennes, de vos traditions, de vos convictions'.<sup>49</sup> Similar promises were repeated by Poincaré in 1915, by General Pétain in 1918, by Edouard Herriot that same year, and on more than one occasion, by Alexandre Millerand over the years which followed *désannexion*. Undoubtedly, these promises implied to the populations of the provinces that France intended leaving their religious statute intact, that no effort to remove the use of local dialects would be made, that legislation put in place during annexation to which the inhabitants had become accustomed, would remain intact. However, the implications of these solemn promises made by the most

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<sup>47</sup> See Agulhon, Maurice, *Nation, patrie, patriotisme en France du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris, 1993. Such resistance among the women of the Moselle to German charms is not borne out in the marriage statistics. See chapter two, p.45, Table 5.

<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, this very promise was quoted in the book commemorating the return of the provinces to France. Weiss, *Le Premier Voyage Officiel*, p.37.

<sup>49</sup> Pronounced 24 November 1914 at Thann, Lower Alsace, in the area occupied by French troops after the first offensive of the war. In Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.20.



prestigious of French leaders, completely contradicted the impression created by the same French leadership among *Français de l'intérieur*. They had been led to believe that the provinces were so anxious to become French once again, that the sacrifices necessary to bring them in line with the rest of France would be of little consequence to the indigenous populations. Indeed, the population of France was convinced that Alsace and the Moselle would imperceptibly fall in line with the rest of the Third French Republic, the integration process allowing any unfortunate bad German habits to melt away. This was the myth of Alsace-Lorraine. For French observers, therefore, the celebrations which accompanied the arrival of the French soldiers, could only be interpreted as the salute of a solidly patriotic indigenous population. After 47 years of resistance, November 1918 was their much longed for liberation.

Another way of reading these celebrations, suggested here, is based on the more recent acceptance that Germanisation, despite the very real problems it encountered over the years, had made numerous improvements and brought positive changes to the lives of the inhabitants of the Moselle, even those who were Francophone. More importantly, this version takes into account the expectations of the indigenous populations by 1914, prior to the outbreak of war. After 43 years of German rule, many of the initial difficulties associated with the transfer of sovereignty within the region had been resolved. Germanisation during the period had not been consistently brutal, as some Francophile versions have claimed. Certainly, there were those among the Francophone indigenous population who remained unmoved by the linguistic and cultural changes brought about by Germanisation. Many had found the German take-over of power in the provinces particularly intrusive. However, two generations had been born and educated under German rule, marriages between the

immigrant population and the indigenous population were by no means uncommon, and significant legislative, administrative, economic, and urban developments had made positive and popular changes within the regions. Just as important as the relative advances made by Germanisation, is the fact that few events had occurred during the period of annexation up to 1914 which had indicated a likelihood that France would ever be in a position to ensure the regions' return to French sovereignty. As Stevenson points out, between 1887 and 1905, the danger of a Franco-German war receded. Although in theory French governments continued to support revanchism,<sup>50</sup> none was at all interested in going to war in the name of the lost provinces.<sup>51</sup> Adamthwaite quotes the German ambassador in Paris as stating in February 1914, 'the bellicose desire for revenge ... is now outmoded. It only exists to a certain extent in theory. The wound of 1871 still burns in all French hearts, but nobody is inclined to risk his or her son's bones for the question of Alsace-Lorraine'.<sup>52</sup> Up to 1914, therefore, the future had remained unarguably German. Only after war between France and Germany had been declared, due to reasons unrelated to the Alsace-Lorraine question, did this future come into question once again. Clearly, though, it would be wrong to assume that those among the indigenous population who lived their lives in the light of this, and who might have been considered successfully 'Germanized', were now Germanophile. Those who sought employment in the German civil service, for example, did not necessarily seek to endorse German rule. For purely practical reasons, individuals' behaviour was more often dictated by

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<sup>50</sup> Even the strength and importance of French revanchism itself is questionable. Bariéty and Poidevin suggest that with the exception of certain intellectuels and the creation of the revanchist groups such as the *Ligues des patriotes*, revanchism was only really sustained in schools where, they claim, patriotism had replaced the role of religion. Poidevin, Raymond, and Bariéty, Jacques, *Les relations franco-allemands 1815-1975*, Paris, 1977, p.111.

<sup>51</sup> Stevenson, D., *French War Aims Against Germany 1914-1919*, Oxford, 1982, p.2.

<sup>52</sup> Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery*, p.18.



circumstances rather than by patriotism or sentiment. Whilst Germanisation had certainly enjoyed its successes, clearly the region would require a further passage of time, and of generations, before the whole process could mature into widespread, pro-German sentiment.

As for the populations' rejection of German rule in November 1918, implied by the celebrations and festivities described above, this must be viewed in the light of German behaviour towards the populations during the war. The German military managed to undo 43 years of steady assimilation in a matter of months following the outbreak of hostilities. Martial law brought censorship of the press and post within the regions. 'War Committees' were created in order to identify, round up, and imprison all persons suspected of even the most minor anti-German offence. It was largely the Francophone population which feared these committees. Alsatians and *Mosellans* were treated with distrust by the military, to the extent that soldiers, recruited from the indigenous population, were sent to the Russian front as it was felt they could not be relied upon to fight against the French on the Western Front.<sup>53</sup> The cruel, unpredictable behaviour of some of the German military personnel during the war instilled a fear among the indigenous population. This could not be erased by Scheidemann's plan to grant autonomy to the regions in October 1918, or by his proposal of a neutral state a matter of weeks later. Frédéric Eccard shows that, amongst the indigenous, French-speaking bourgeoisie, patriotic sentiment had always remained alive during annexation. However, it was the brutality of the Prussian military personnel which, he claimed, pushed the rest of the population into the arms of

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<sup>53</sup> During the Second World War, soldiers from the indigenous population forced to fight in the German army were known as the *malgré nous*. From the Moselle alone, 30,000 such soldiers were forcibly recruited in 1942. See Nonnemacher, Georges-Gilbert, *La grande honte de l'incorporation de force des Alsaciens-Lorrains, Eupénous-Malmédiens et Luxembourgeois dans l'armée allemande au cours de la Deuxième guerre mondiale*, Colmar, 1966, p.5.

France.<sup>54</sup> It seems that for these sections of the indigenous population, support for France was derived from a dislike of Germany, rather than from a recognisable sense of French patriotism. At the time of the armistice, therefore, promises from the French military and political hierarchy were a good deal more convincing, and very much more appealing, than the proposals of a country which felt it could not trust the region's population in peacetime, to say nothing of four years of war.

Thus, for the long suffering population of the Moselle, convinced by France and disgusted by Germany, it was not hard to see where their future lay. Primarily, their celebrations during those November days, were in honour of an end to the fighting and the killing. The Moselle had suffered its losses, just like other regions of France. The war had brought food shortages, hardships, disease, and danger to the civilian population. But the tricolours which adorned the villages and towns of the Moselle, and the joyful singing of the *Marseillaise* which echoed day and night through the streets and town halls across the region as French troops performed their liberation marches, were not indicative of a long standing loyalty or patriotism towards the French Republic. They were adopted symbols of an optimism for the *region's* future, a region which could not afford the luxury of neutrality or independence. The fact that this was a French future was almost irrelevant. The festivities reflected the belief that the Moselle could finally find political and social stability, that the region would no longer be treated as the insignificant partner in the context of a *Reichsland*, but would find, once again, its role as a *département* of importance, perhaps even as the prestigious home to the capital of the region of Lorraine. These were the broad

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<sup>54</sup> Eccard, *Pour une politique alsacienne et lorraine*, p.7.



expectations of the population of the Moselle. The finer details could be worked out in the months ahead. Overall, there was plenty to celebrate.

### *A New Beginning*

Alsace-Lorraine can, in fact, in some sense be compared to a lover, who for nearly 50 years has kept up its zeal by sentiment rather than by the reality of facts. The renewal of close acquaintance after such a long period has not failed to produce deception.<sup>55</sup>

In November 1918, it appeared France still had every opportunity to avoid producing such disappointment. However, a fresh start which took careful consideration of the regions' particular situation, which acknowledged the difficulties of a recent, and not so recent, history, which recognized the need for a cautious beginning, was made all the more unlikely by the emergence during the latter stages of the war of differences of opinion among French politicians and key *émigrés*. Here were two regions which had been part of a federal system for 47 years, albeit as an imperial territory rather than a fully fledged state, and which were being returned to a centralized republic. Yet, an immediate and forced alignment with the French judicial, political, and administrative systems was just as hard to imagine in the post-armistice period as the continuation of the federal structures inherited from the German *Reich*.

The policy for the integration of Alsace and the Moselle into France had been examined and discussed at length from 1915 onwards by a variety of committees and conferences, some of them officially appointed by the French government, others of a

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<sup>55</sup> Earl of Derby to Earl Curzon in a letter written 10 October 1919. GFC. 43 vol.16, p.63.

more informal nature. The *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine* was set up on 10 February 1915 by René Viviani of the French Foreign Office and held its meetings at the *Quai d'Orsay* in Paris. Louis Barthou, as president of the *Conférence*, led a distinguished group of high-ranking civil servants, French politicians, and *émigrés* (some of whom had only left the regions following the outbreak of war in 1914). Lorraine was largely under-represented, although Georges Weill, an Alsatian who had been a socialist deputy for Metz in the *Reichstag* from 1912, was appointed. The *Conférence* had, as its mandate, to propose political and administrative solutions to the anticipated integration of the regions into France.

Jules Siegfried founded the *Comité d'études économiques et administratives relatives à l'Alsace-Lorraine*, also in February 1915. This government initiative was very badly received by Lorrainers in Paris as, once again, Lorraine was only represented by Georges Weill. The *groupe lorrain* was therefore formed in response to the *Comité Siegfried* with Maurice Bompard (a *Messin* by birth) as its president. François de Wendel and the *chanoine* Collin were nominated vice-presidents. The *groupe* strongly advised against an "assimilation brutale" of the administration and legislation within the regions, and carefully underlined the differences between the Moselle and Alsace which, they stated, should be borne in mind during the process of integration. In the end, Bompard, de Wendel, and Collin took their places at the *Conférence*, which allowed Lorraine's 'voice' to be heard allowing the *groupe* to restrict its activities, ultimately becoming more of an advisory body to the *Conférence*.<sup>56</sup> Finally, in 1917, as preparations for the return of the regions became more decisive, a *Comité d'études* was formed by academics and members of the

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<sup>56</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.624.



*Académie Française*. Ernest Lavisse was president and Vidal de la Blache became vice-president. This was an unofficial body whose task it was to gather information about the region's history, geography, and economy.

As Jean-Louis Masson shows, these various groups and committees presented three broad solutions to integration of the provinces from which the French government could choose.<sup>57</sup> The first solution opted to give Alsace-Lorraine a regional structure and a special status within the Republic, continuing the German-style administration. This would clearly have suited many Alsatians as Strasbourg would have remained as overall capital. It was also favoured by regionalists in France who saw Alsace-Lorraine as a testing ground for their ideas. The second approach recommended the re-establishment of the system of departments whilst conserving, for a lengthy period, a transitional regime but retaining as the ultimate aim the implementation of French law in the regions. The idea of a lengthy period of adjustment appealed to many Alsatians and Lorrainers, who were well aware of the need to avoid abrupt change. It also increased their chances of negotiating in specific areas certain concessions. The third solution proposed an almost immediate return to French law and administration, reinstating the pre-1871 departmental boundaries. Only a very few Lorrainers, staunchly patriotic to France, and fiercely anti-Alsatian, favoured this. Almost all other *émigrés* and observers considered this an unwise and hasty way to proceed. As a result, the overall thrust of the wartime recommendations opted for a transitional period of a significant duration, allowing for a gentle and subtle approach to bringing Alsace-Lorraine in line with other French regions. Furthermore, the *Conférence* stressed in its final reports that, initially, there should not be a return to

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<sup>57</sup> Masson, *Histoire administrative de la Lorraine*, p.430.

pre-1871 departmental boundaries. It claimed such a move would create among other difficulties, financial complications, as departmental budgets for the Moselle would be out of step with those of the other three Lorrainer departments.<sup>58</sup> The report stated, it would be 'plus facile d'admettre qu'une petite partie de la France soit soumise provisoirement à une législation spéciale, que d'admettre, pour un même département, deux législations différentes.'<sup>59</sup>

Despite the overwhelming advice to exercise caution, the prevailing opinion within Clemenceau's inner circle was for as swift a reconstitution of the lost provinces as possible. This reflects, of course, their self-made dilemma created by the wartime propaganda efforts to convince the French people that the populations of Alsace-Lorraine were sufficiently French to be worth fighting for, and likewise to convince the returned populations that France would accept them as they were. Clemenceau's inner circle, though, was convinced that returning the regions to the French system of departments was the only way of avoiding a strengthening of the original German institutions, although they did concede that a provisional administration of short duration was inevitable.<sup>60</sup> What became the most important aim of the French government, as the return of Alsace-Lorraine became a reality, was to ensure that until the peace conference, the myth, created during the war, remained intact in order that the populations' desire to return to France be recognized internationally. According to the French government, this could only be achieved by swiftly implementing measures

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<sup>58</sup> A return to pre-1871 boundaries would have resulted in the return of the *arrondissement* of Briey to the Moselle and the return of the *arrondissements* of Château-Salins and Sarrebourg to the Meurthe-et-Moselle.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Masson, *Histoire Administrative de la Lorraine*, p.429. Masson also points out that although recommendations were made by the *Conférence*, these reflected only the majority opinion. Some, for example, even among the Alsatians present, were unhappy about the continuing unity of Alsace-Lorraine in the *Reichsland* form.

<sup>60</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.649.



to curb separatist, federalist, or pro-German activity, and by erasing all that represented the now defunct German administration.<sup>61</sup> Hence, the immediate move to eliminate the title and concept of 'Alsace-Lorraine'. Alsace-Lorraine had never existed in French eyes, and therefore the term should no longer be used.<sup>62</sup>

So, how did the new French administration function in the regions immediately following their return to France? In Paris, prior to the end of the war, *Services* were set up in order to deal with the provinces' affairs: their administration, civilian matters, and the Alsace-Lorraine statute. On 15 November 1918, a decree was signed creating a *commissaire de la République* for each department, the idea being that this post would later be translated into that of prefect, as in all other French departments. Léon Mirman<sup>63</sup> became *commissaire* for the Moselle and likewise, Georges Maringer for the Bas Rhin. However, the latter also became *haut commissaire*, a role which allowed him to supervise affairs affecting all three of the returned provinces. This position did not, strictly speaking, replace the German *Statthalter*, as an administration was set up in Paris which was directly controlled by the Under Secretary of State Jules Jeanneney, thereby shifting overall control of the regions from Strasbourg to Paris. Jeanneney and Maringer were brothers-in-law and, as Paul Smith points out, they embodied Clemenceau's thoughtless and insensitive approach to the question of the returned provinces, an approach which was not to become any less insensitive as time passed. Assigning two Protestant republicans to the task of dealing with a largely Catholic population was a sign of even greater tactlessness to come.<sup>64</sup> Mirman was no better a

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<sup>61</sup> Smith, 'From the *Reich* to the Republic', in *France: Nation and Regions*, Kelly, M., and Böck, R., eds., Southampton, 1993, pp.182-189, p.183.

<sup>62</sup> ADM, 301 M 52.

<sup>63</sup> Mirman was Prefect for the Meurthe-et-Moselle from 1914 to 1918, and was *commissaire de la République* in the Moselle from 1918 to 1919.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, Paul, 'From the *Reich* to the Republic', in *France: Nation and Regions*, Kelly, M., and Böck, R., eds., Southampton, 1993, pp.182-189, p.187.

choice. As Roth states, his *jacobin* temperament prevented him from understanding the delicate issues of religion and regionalism within the Moselle.<sup>65</sup> One of his first acts as *commissaire* was to take over the prefecture buildings in Metz from his German predecessor, Baron von Gemmingen-Hornberg. His account of this, sent to Jeanneney, gives a useful indication of his style.

Je mets M.Gemmingen en demeure de partir; il demande  
des délais craignant les difficultés d'un déménagement  
rapide[...] Cette vieille bête insista, je lui répons que  
l'un de nous devait ce soir coucher à l'hôtel, ou lui qui ne  
représentait plus rien, ou moi qui représentait le  
gouvernement de la République.<sup>66</sup>

In fact, the organisation of the administration which resulted from a series of decrees in November and December 1918, as well as the attitudes towards integration of the regions implied by the appointments of the above individuals, provoked deep criticism from the earliest stages. Excessive centralisation and the hurried *départementalisation* of the provinces meant that by March 1919, a complete overhaul of the administration was required. Jeanneney's plans to slip the provinces back into France without any fuss or bother, retaining for as brief a period as possible local and German legislation, were stunningly unsuccessful. In fact, his actions merely led to the rapid emergence among the population of a sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the new administration, the *malaise lorrain*.

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<sup>65</sup> François Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.28.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Roth, François, 'Un préfet de guerre en Lorraine: Léon Mirman', in *Revue administrative de l'Est de la France*, no.16, 1979, pp.5-19, p.14.



Other more practical problems faced the new regime during those early days. Of course, the demobilisation of *Mosellan* and Alsatian soldiers, who had fought during the war in the German army, had to be carried out by the French army. Not only were they to be demobilized, they also had to be repatriated. Despite initial promises of a swift return of soldiers to their homes, delays soon occurred. Firstly, the German military authorities did not always follow Ebert's instructions to release Alsatian and *Mosellan* soldiers. Secondly, transportation presented difficulties. As German soldiers retreated and made their way home, Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers attempted to go against this human tide. Many were without correct or adequate papers which created further delays. News of soldiers' whereabouts, especially those who had been fighting on the Russian front, failed to reach families in the provinces and concerns were voiced increasingly in the press. On 18 November the press in Metz stated, 'Le retour des soldats lorrains qui avaient servi dans l'armée allemande s'effectue avec une lenteur désespérante. Les familles sont inquiètes. Depuis quinze jours, les nouvelles manquent totalement'.<sup>67</sup> Once soldiers actually arrived in the region, they were sent to barracks and military centres, where they had to await a hearing before tribunals set up to assess their national sentiment. Only those who managed to show their loyalty to France were repatriated. The rest were denied entry to the regions. Rumours circulated suggesting that if Alsace-Lorraine soldiers returning to the regions arrived in civilian dress, their cases would be processed more swiftly than those arriving in German military uniform. Sadly, this was not the case, and even provisions in the Treaty of Versailles failed to improve matters significantly.

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Brasme, Pierre, 'Le rapatriement des prisonniers et des combattants alsaciens-lorrains (1918-1920)', *Bulletin de liaison de l'A.N.S.B.V.*, 1988, pp.140-147, p.142.

However, the new regime, as well as the French military authorities, was blamed for failing to treat the situation with more urgency, and for taking so long to bring about demobilisation.

Further difficulties faced the new regime including the need to repair damage to the Moselle caused by the close proximity of the region to front-line fighting.<sup>68</sup>

Although only small areas of the Moselle were affected, some villages and farmland were more damaged than others. Property had been damaged, livestock stolen or requisitioned, and furniture and personal belongings removed as the German army had made its way to and from the front. The French authorities moved swiftly to offer assistance to the region, taking advantage of an opportunity to show its commitment to the returned population and its welfare. The re-supplying of food to the region also took priority in November and December 1918, and very soon the population found, having suffered from the allied blockade of Germany during the last months of the war, that gradually most basic foodstuffs could be obtained in Metz for the first time in many months. However, prices were not controlled, and, very quickly, unfavourable comparisons were made with prices in nearby Nancy.

Clearly, there was more to integration than simply dealing with the immediate practical difficulties of the initial few weeks. For the new administration, of much greater importance was the formation and consolidation of French sentiment among the region's indigenous population. In their desire to perpetuate the idea of France, "une et indivisible", any regional dissent, or any divergence from French republican patriotism, could not be accepted in the provinces. The period of annexation presented a multitude of issues which were at odds with French republicanism. It was certainly

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<sup>68</sup> See Clout, Hugh, 'Rural revival: the recovery of the Moselle after World War I', in *Modern and Contemporary France*, 1994, NS2(4), pp.395-403.



easier in some ways for the French government to treat the situation as if German annexation had not really happened. However, by working *with* the myth they had created, the French authorities could not accept that Alsace and the Moselle had developed along different religious, political, and cultural lines for the duration of German rule.<sup>69</sup> And the idea that a half-way house between a federal state and a centralized state could be found, or made to work, was too risky in the light of the approaching peace conference. France had to be seen to be in control of its unruly children. For this reason, the French approach to integration was, from the start, based on the idea that only French sentiment was ‘good’ sentiment. Anything else was German, and ‘bad’, and therefore should be suppressed or removed. During those early, frantic days, there was no room for those who found it hard to consider themselves anything other than *Mosellan*, or at best *Lorrain*, even though *indigènes* who had considered themselves specifically German prior to the signing of the armistice, were few and far between.

### *Concluding remarks*

A useful analogy for the return of the *Moselle* and Alsace to France is that of the children of divorced parents. After years spent living half the week with one parent, and half the week with the other, it soon becomes clear that stability in each child’s life is not derived from the warring parents but from the siblings. The population of the Moselle (one of the children, in this case), had come to accept Germany (the *Vaterland*) but not necessarily German nationality or pro-German sentiment. In 1918, not all within the population could remember what it had been like to be part of France

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<sup>69</sup> See Maas’ useful discussion of this point in, ‘Zeitenwende in Elsaß-Lothringen’, in Speitkamp, Winfried, ed., *Denkmalsturz*, Gottingen, 1997, pp.79-108.

(*la mère patrie*) prior to 1871 and even then, they were only familiar with life in the French Empire, not the Third French Republic. This is not to suggest that there was necessarily a sense of unity among the children, or within the Moselle's population. In spite of each parent's faults, one child might have more affection for the father, another for the mother. In 1918, though, by attempting to separate what was French from what was German within the region, France omitted to take into consideration the complexities of the situation its lost children had experienced. For a week between the signing of the armistice and the entry of French troops, they had found themselves in no man's land, a political vacuum, and had automatically fallen back on their own resources in order to stabilize the situation. If France was to win their confidence and to earn their love and respect, it would need to do a great deal more than make superficial promises and put on lavish liberation ceremonies.



### *Summary*

Germany's last-ditch attempt, between September and November 1918, to prevent its *Reichsland* from falling into French hands, an attempt which initially offered the regions' populations autonomy within the *Reich* and then promoted the idea of an independent, neutral state, failed to raise even minimal interest. The offer simply came too late in the day. The brief impact of the German Revolution on the regions with the formation of soldiers and workers' revolutionary councils, led to disarray in the German army, caused strikes in key industries, and created pockets of communist activity which were to become the source of friction within the regions over the months which followed. Despite the formation of a National Assembly, and the declaration of a Republic in Alsace-Lorraine during the early days of November, a sense of suspended animation fell over the regions between the signing of the armistice and the entry of French troops, broken only by the pomp and circumstance of the liberation marches and the widespread celebrations which followed. However, it is clear that what was being celebrated by the indigenous population in the Moselle was not so much a return to being French, as an end to fighting, an end to Germany's martial law, an end to food shortages, and an end to being German. Although used as evidence of pro-French sentiment by French officials, these celebrations were clearly the result of immediate circumstances rather than of long-term ideological convictions and national identity. The failure to recognise this, as well as the failure to follow the recommendations of wartime committees gradually to integrate the provinces into France, exercising tact and sensitivity in the process, sowed the seeds of a *malaise lorrain*, even before the year was out. Winning over public opinion within the French

interior, as well as on the international front, were clearly considered more pressing than the task of winning over the regions' populations beyond the superficiality of the 1918 celebrations.



## Chapter IV

### Administration of the Moselle and the *malaise lorrain*

France in 1918 was, in many respects, radically different from the France the Moselle had known before 1870. The principal difference was, of course, that France had become a republic, formed after Napoleon III's expansionist foreign policy had collapsed in the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian War. Alsace and annexed Lorraine, though, had continued within the authoritarian structures of an empire, albeit German. There had, inevitably, been numerous changes to the structure and administration of the French nation under the Third Republic. However, three areas in particular were of concern to the populations of Alsace and the Moselle. Firstly, the Ferry Laws of the 1880s, among other achievements, reduced the role of the Catholic clergy in schools, replacing the 1850 *Loi Falloux* which had previously sought to increase Catholic influence.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the Dreyfus Affair had shocked Alsatians in particular, but also *mosellans*, whose Jewish community was centred largely in Metz. This was because the affair had demonstrated anti-Semitic sentiment among the French population, which had hitherto gone largely undetected, and which was clearly at odds with French ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality. Thirdly, and most importantly, the 1905 laic laws radically changed the image of France, an image which had been carefully preserved by many within the indigenous populations of the Moselle and Alsace. By separating the Church from the State, the laws engendered in these provinces a deep sense of disillusionment and estrangement from *la mère patrie*, at a time when the

autonomist movement was appearing to gain some ground in its attempt to win a constitution for the *Reichsland*. By the beginning of the First World War, it was becoming clear that France, and its lost provinces, were living increasingly separate lives.

The war, though, changed everything, and it was not long before the return of the lost provinces became the primary French war aim.<sup>2</sup> Equally, within the two provinces, German actions against the indigenous populations brought the question of a return to French sovereignty back into the limelight. Thus, in November 1918, Alsace and the Moselle were seized by France after a period of separation which amounted to almost half a century.<sup>3</sup> The initial emotions and declarations have been dealt with in the previous chapter. What will be dealt with here are the complex questions of administrative and legal integration, the difficulties they posed, and the extent to which mistakes in French policy towards the provinces, as well as unrealistic local expectations, were responsible for the emergence of a *malaise lorrain*. However, a brief profile of post-war France is necessary before examining the specific experience of the Moselle.

### *Post-war France*

The post-war celebrations, which swept across the French nation, were influenced by a somewhat unrealistic optimism that prosperity and pre-war abundance would swiftly return. Few were prepared, or willing, to accept that recovery from a war such as this

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Ferry (1832-1893) brought about the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, state certification of school teachers, lycées for girls, and encouraged training in technology and languages. He sought to reduce the Catholic clergy's influence in education.

<sup>2</sup> Baechler, Christian, 'L'Alsace-Lorraine dans les relations franco-allemandes', in Bariéty, J., Guth, A., Valentin, J. M., *La France et l'Allemagne*, Nancy, 1987, pp.69-109, p.69.



would be preceded by a period of intense hardship. Shortages of food and essential goods, a greatly diminished workforce (the war had cost France 1,300,000 lives), insufficient raw materials for industry, reduced levels of livestock, agricultural machinery, and fertilizer, meant that France was to suffer short-term misery and long-term discomfort well into the 1920s. Working class agitation in 1919 and 1920 led to strikes, whilst a wave of revolutionary activity across Europe aroused fear and paranoia among the political classes and the population as a whole. The loss of life had serious consequences for the birth-rate and the number of marriages over the years which followed, the only increase in population resulting from the very large numbers of immigrant workers arriving in France. Most came from Poland and other Eastern European countries, as well as Italy.<sup>4</sup>

In politics, the aggressive nationalism of the *Bloc national* between 1919 and 1924, followed by the crisis-ridden, anti-clerical *Cartel des gauches* between 1924 and 1926, meant that the early 1920s produced a turbulent period in French political history. Both of these governments posed problems for Alsace and the Moselle. The first, initially under Clemenceau in 1918, led to a series of hasty decisions regarding the future of the provinces and their integration, decisions based on the joyous reception in the regions of the French liberation, but also on the desire to resolve the question quickly. It is not entirely clear why Clemenceau acted so hastily, sweeping aside the carefully considered advice of the wartime committees and councils. He was certainly not naïve enough to believe the integration process could be rushed through simply in order to avoid local dissent. In fact, as he recalled on 5 November 1918 after

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<sup>3</sup> The provinces were 'seized', rather than 'returned', as it was only after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles that French claims to the regions were internationally recognized, and French sovereignty over the provinces was made legal.

announcing the terms of the armistice, Clemenceau was the last survivor of those who had signed the protest against the Treaty of Frankfurt and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he had never sought to hide the fact that he felt personally wounded by the events of 1871, nor did he ever seek to hide his dislike for, and distrust of, Germany, something which his efforts at the Paris Peace Conference clearly illustrate. However, apart from the official visit in December 1918, Clemenceau's involvement in dealing with the situation in Alsace and the Moselle should not be overestimated. Prior to the opening of the Peace Conference in January 1919, he was extremely preoccupied preparing the French case to be presented at Versailles. What little time he had was taken up with the numerous official visits around the country, in particular to those areas devastated by war and in greatest need of support and encouragement from the government. Domestic matters, including the integration of Alsace and the Moselle, were therefore handed over to the relevant government officials, in this case, the under-Secretary of State, Jules Jeanneney, a republican radical who openly despised Germany, and to the *Services d'Alsace-Lorraine* which had been set up prior to the end of the war in Paris. However, the most likely reason for the government's haste, and for Clemenceau's apparent lack of interest in a tactful approach to the situation, was the need, ahead of the Paris Peace Conference, to forestall any argument about the regions' unconditional return to French sovereignty. Clemenceau did not wish to face any objections from Britain or the United States on what was only one small aspect of the peace treaty. However, failure to deliver ratification of the return of annexed Lorraine and Alsace to the French people, would almost certainly have resulted in a dramatic loss of public confidence in his

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<sup>4</sup> See Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Bernstein, Serge, *Victoire et Frustrations 1914-29*, Paris, 1990, p.162. Chapter 7 deals comprehensively with the effects of war on France. See also chapter seven,



government. Although the return of the provinces was an integral part of ensuring French security against Germany, self-determination remained a key moral issue at the conference. In the end, the successful outcome of the peace talks for Clemenceau on the count of the Moselle and Alsace, which backdated their return to 11 November 1918 and ignored Germany's call for a plebiscite, was counterbalanced by his failure to convince the British and the Americans to give France the desired level of security against further German aggression.

Following the peace treaty, the success of the *Bloc national* up to 1924 was a clear reflection of the desire for national unity, and was indicative of the vain hope that the government which had won France the war could also win it a prosperous peace. However, it was the *Bloc national*, largely under Poincaré as President, which had to deal with a series of crises at home and abroad, including the political crisis of 1920 and 21, the French occupation of the Ruhr, and continuous strikes by workers. Their failure to resolve these crises led, in 1924, to the election of the *Cartel des gauches* headed by Edouard Herriot.<sup>6</sup> Although not intended as a radical move, his proposals to apply all aspects of republican legislation throughout the country, including bringing to an end the special religious regime in Alsace and the Moselle, created a reaction far stronger than any he could have anticipated. Reaction was strongest in the returned provinces, but soon spread to the rest of France, leading ultimately to the downfall of the socialist coalition in 1926. Herriot was unable to make any anticlerical legislation stick during his brief period in power, and the continued existence of the *Concordat* in the Moselle and Alsace is testimony to his mishandling of the populations, rather than to any sudden upsurge in support for clericalism within the population as a whole. In

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*The workforce*, pp.260-270 below.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, D R., *Georges Clemenceau. A Political Biography*, London, 1979, p 326.

any case, by the late 1920s, the perceived threat from the Catholic Church and other religious orders (a threat which had fueled anticlerical sentiment from as far back as 1789), and therefore the need to enforce radical legislation, had slipped from political consciousness. Finally, it was Poincaré, heading a national union government, who was brought back in 1926. He stabilized the franc, thereby calming the nation, and restoring confidence. Clearly, these were unsettled times and difficult years for the French population as a whole, a factor which must be borne in mind in assessments of the very localized problems of the Moselle and Alsace.

### *The structure*

At the end of the First World War, and right up to the entry of French troops in November 1918, much uncertainty remained as to how the new administration of Alsace and the Moselle would be structured. International law prevented anything more than the implementation of a provisional administration in the initial stages. The decrees of 15 and 26 November sought to suppress the concept of 'Alsace-Lorraine', creating a new regime based on the original concept of three departments. Annexed Lorraine, although it did not correspond geographically to any pre-1871 department, was renamed the Moselle. The question of its boundaries was set to one side, whilst the initial problems of integration were addressed. Equally, the two districts within Alsace regained their pre-1870 departmental names, the Bas-Rhin and the Haut-Rhin. The territory of Belfort, which had remained French throughout annexation, attached as it was to the Vosges department of Lorraine, remained outside Alsace, again to

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<sup>6</sup> See Jeanneney, Jean-Noël, *Leçon d'histoire pour une gauche au pouvoir. La faillite du Cartel 1924-26*, Paris, 1977.



avoid complications.<sup>7</sup> On 15 September 1918, a *Comité consultatif d'Alsace-Lorraine* was created in Paris, which was to be consulted on all administrative or organizational questions within the territories. The committee was reorganized by the decree of 26 November, and became the *Conseil supérieur d'Alsace et Lorraine*. This decree also placed in overall charge of the regions the *Président du Conseil*, the head of the French Government under the constitution of the Third French Republic, who, at that stage, was Georges Clemenceau. He, in turn, delegated all power to Jules Jeanneney, the Under Secretary of State.

The three *commissaires de la République* were Georges Maringer in the Bas-Rhin, Henri Poulet in the Haut-Rhin, and Léon Mirman in the Moselle. The intention was that they should function as departmental prefects, as in the rest of France. In the meantime, Georges Maringer took on the role of *haut-commissaire* dealing with matters which concerned the three departments collectively. Very quickly it was realized, by the *commissaires* themselves, that the complexities of the situation could not be dealt with in the framework provided. The excessive and hurried centralization of administrative procedure to Paris provoked deep criticism from within the provinces, which was fueled by the *commissaires'* inability to speak German. Overwhelmed by the sheer size of the task facing them, the *commissaires* soon lost heart. Their often inept handling of the situation was hard to hide from the press, and the administration rapidly descended into disorder within weeks of the French liberation, prompting increasingly unfavourable comparisons with the German

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<sup>7</sup> Masson also points out that many Alsations were keen to retain the post-1870 departmental boundaries, as this helped to perpetuate the sense of *particularisme* within the regions, emphasising the fact that both geography *and* sentiment had changed within the regions during annexation, and that such differences should therefore be accommodated by the new French administration by way of a more liberal regionalist policy. Masson, *Histoire administrative de la Lorraine. Des provinces aux départements et à la région*, Paris, 1982, p.431. Masson provides an excellent survey of the administrative structures put in place during this period.

administration. Maringer was the first to admit that matters were not going according to plan, and informed Paris that an overhaul of the administration was urgently required.

On 21 March 1919, a *commissariat général de la République* was created in Strasbourg, and a *commissaire général* replaced Maringer's post of *haut commissaire*. This amounted to a public admission that the early French administration had failed. Equally, the position and responsibilities of the new *commissaire général* were remarkably similar to those of the German *Statthalter*. Alexandre Millerand, a *grand homme politique*, took up the post and was given far-reaching powers. He was answerable to the Minister for War, and, ultimately, the President of the Republic. Up until the national elections of November 1919, Alsace and the Moselle were ruled in this way, with no political representation in the French parliament. Again, this prompted comparisons with the outgoing German administration, which had granted both a regional parliament (which sent representatives to the *Reichstag*), and a regional government, which had dealt expeditiously with regional affairs, equivalents of which did not appear to be on offer from France.

Millerand's office was in Strasbourg rather than Paris, a move which brought an instant improvement in the administration's efficiency, which in turn brought an instant improvement in its popularity. What helped most was the fact that decisions were taken by orders, or *arrêtés*, rather than by complicated decrees which had to pass through parliament before they could be enacted. Millerand was undoubtedly the right man for the job. His attitude towards the regions' unfortunate situation was more understanding and open than that of his predecessor. However, he had two difficult tasks. Firstly, he had to resolve the difficulties created by the initial four months of French administration, soothing the ruffled populations, and reaffirming original French



promises, many of which already appeared to have been broken. Secondly, he had to prepare the way for progressive assimilation. The latter had, of course, been the main French aim from the start. It was only now accepted that this process could not be achieved from one day to the next. Yet, the task facing Millerand and his administration was indeed awesome. Eccard lists some of the areas requiring Millerand's immediate attention upon his arrival: the restoration of adequate fuel, food, and raw material supplies; the repair of war-damaged areas of the regions; the maintenance of the transportation system; the reorganization of the administrative system; the replacement of those Germans working in the legal profession and the civil service with their French equivalents. He also had to address the exchange of currencies, questions of nationality, the removal of undesirable elements from the population, and the liquidation of German property. He had to reorganize the education system, create a new teaching personnel, consider the taxation and social insurance systems, resolve the religious and language questions, and prepare the way for the assimilation of all areas of legislation. On top of this, he had to consider public opinion within the region, weighing this up with the French Government's objectives in Paris.<sup>8</sup>

From 10 May 1919, power was centred even more in Strasbourg, as the *Conseil supérieur* was transferred from Paris. Millerand, as *commissaire général*, became president of this council, and it was he who sought (unsuccessfully) to translate it into a *Conseil régional*. The council's aim was to help the *commissaire général* in the process of assimilation and integration, and it was to be made up largely of experts and specialists able to represent the diverse interests of the region. In the

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<sup>8</sup> Eccard, 'L'Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général et après sa suppression', in *Revue politique et parlementaire*, November 1925, pp.197-237, p.207.

event, a slightly different format was adopted which created three *Conseils généraux* in the three departments. A *Conseil régional* then met four times a year to deliberate on issues arising from the departmental level. On 17 October 1919, a law was introduced to clarify the nature of the overall administrative regime, formally accepting that the *commissariat général* in Strasbourg would be maintained, albeit provisionally. It was given no 'life expectancy' at this stage. Such a time restriction would undoubtedly have been badly received by the local population, and, in any case, would have been very difficult to calculate, as those already in the regions had gradually recognized.

Millerand's term as *commissaire général* marked one of the high points in French handling of the provinces' return to France. His main problem was his early departure, as he was recalled to Paris in January 1920 to become premier and foreign minister under Paul Deschanel.<sup>9</sup> His success can be measured in the speed with which he reassured the populations, combining his regionalist interests with his awareness of how far he could push the returned populations in order to achieve assimilation as quickly as possible without encountering resistance. His numerous speeches and interviews demonstrate his distinctive bedside manner.

'L'Alsace et la Lorraine sont passionnément françaises,  
mais elles sont en même temps passionnément  
alsaciennes et lorraines. Comment pourrions-nous leur  
en vouloir d'un particularisme qui leur a permis de se  
conserver à nous?' <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Millerand then replaced Deschanel as President of the Republic.

<sup>10</sup> Millerand, quoted in Eccard, 'L'Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général', in *Revue politique et parlementaire*, November 1925, p.208.



Eccard's glowing appraisal of the 'rôle capital joué par Millerand jusqu'au jour de son départ le 20 janvier 1920', reflected approval felt in both the Moselle and Alsace, who were otherwise critical of the opening months of French rule in the provinces.

Cette puissance de travail, cette grande intelligence, cette nature de chef qui distinguaient Millerand, lui permirent de réaliser dans le court espace de dix mois, une oeuvre que l'on ne saurait qualifier autrement que de formidable et qui posa les principaux jalons de celle continuée par ses successeurs.<sup>11</sup>

His successor was, in fact, the apolitical diplomat, Gabriel Alapetite, a high-ranking civil servant who sadly lacked the panache, presence, and influence of Millerand. His appointment, therefore, marked the beginning of another troublesome era in the administration of the provinces. Millerand's ability to obtain funds seemingly from nowhere, to display such generous empathy with the regions' desire for decentralization whilst planning their full assimilation into the Republic, and to demonstrate his political weight at every turn, made him a hard act to follow. Alapetite appeared almost impotent in contrast. The very fact that he had previously been *Résident Général* in Tunis, seemed to imply that, according to the French Government, the former *Reichsland* required a *commissaire général* with experience in the French colonies to handle it.<sup>12</sup> Alapetite soon came under fierce attack, despite attempting to continue most of Millerand's policies, and sharing many of Millerand's sentiments about the integration process of the provinces. This is illustrated in a

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<sup>11</sup> Eccard, Frédéric, *Le livre de ma vie*, Strasbourg, 1951, p.103.

<sup>12</sup> See Jaeger, Jules-Albert, 'Un grand fonctionnaire, Gabriel Alapetite', in *L'Alsace Française. Revue hebdomadaire d'action nationale*, 3 April 1932, year 12, no. 14, written following Alapetite's death. Alapetite had been recalled from Madrid where he was ambassador to France in order to take up the post as *commissaire général* in Strasbourg.

comment he made at the end of his time in Strasbourg, when he expressed the hope that the ongoing integration process would not mean that benefits from the period of German annexation would be lost, and that 'people who had become accustomed to electric light should not have to go back to the use of oil lamps'.<sup>13</sup> His term of office in Strasbourg was dogged every step of the way by rumours that his departure was imminent. The press reckoned he should never have been appointed to the post, one newspaper declaring

Résident général à Tunis, il y a laissé le souvenir d'un  
homme sans initiative, sans volonté [...] Ambassador à  
Madrid, il représenta la France sans aucun éclat ni relief,  
donnant l'impression d'un diplomate dénué de toute  
valeur professionnelle.<sup>14</sup>

Almost immediately following Alapetite's appointment, the process of *rattachements*, of handing over control of key areas of the regions' administration, was accelerated, thus undermining the authority and reputation of the new *commissariat général*. The result was clearly detrimental to the smooth running of the provinces, as ministers in Paris, often demonstrating a complete ignorance of the complexities of the regions' legislative and administrative peculiarities, stumbled from one crisis to another. Between the end of 1920 and early 1922, control over the railways, civil and criminal justice, finance, mining, and the postal and telegraph services, were all handed back to Paris. Yet these were clearly 'safe areas' - sections of local administration which could be transferred with little protest from the local populations, whose attention was firmly focused on the key issues of education, religion, and language.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in report from Lord Crewe in Paris to the British Foreign Office, 19 May 1924. PRO, FO 371/10545.



In July 1922, Alapetite, a man of honour and integrity, if lacking somewhat in rhetoric, was ordered to present himself before a government committee to defend his position, as well as that of the *Commissariat*. The Government, anxious to bring the provisional administration to a close, sought an explanation as to why the pace of integration could not be quickened. Alapetite stated that it was his duty to introduce French legislation to the provinces, “avec l’assentiment et la collaboration des populations intéressées.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, only a matter of months later, Louis Barthou, the minister in charge of affairs concerning the returned provinces, was sent to Strasbourg to announce the proposed suppression of the *commissariat général*. However, upon arriving in Alsace, he was quickly converted to the idea that this would, in fact, not only be unwise, but illegal.<sup>16</sup> He changed his speech, promising in place of the proposed suppression, the offer of the Government’s support and cooperation within the regions. This is a clear example of how this kind of change of heart only ever occurred when the situation was viewed not from the centre, but from the periphery itself.

The stay of execution for the *commissariat général* was short lived, as Barthou was succeeded by Colrat, who was pro-centralization. He was keen for the suppression of the *commissariat* to take place on 1 July 1924, but he found little support for this early conclusion of the special administration. Such uncertainty and divergence of opinion in Paris could not fail to engender criticism in the local press. The French Government’s obsession with drawing the *commissariat général* to an early close, undoubtedly played its part in undermining the overall process of

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<sup>14</sup> ADBR 121 AL 154, file marked ‘Coupures de presse 1920-1923, article entitled ‘M. Alapetite quitterait Strasbourg prochainement’.

<sup>15</sup> Eccard, ‘L’Alsace et la Lorraine sous le Commissariat Général’ in *Revue politique et parlementaire*, November 1925, pp.197-237, p 214.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

integration. Instead of bolstering the image of the special administration in the provinces, by allocating adequate political and financial power to give the likes of Alapetite the necessary room for manoeuvre, the French government consistently weakened the *commissariat's* public image, casting doubt over its very existence, and weakening its authority. Newspaper headlines as early as May 1920, announced 'M. Alapetite quitterait Strasbourg - La fin du commissariat général'.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this poor public image, right up to 1924, the *commissariat* was unable to broach the most politically sensitive areas of assimilation for fear of opening a Pandora's box. Yet, after the national elections of 1924 and the arrival of the *Cartel des gauches* in power, a far more brutal approach was taken. Ignoring the difficulties of the previous administration in resolving the contradiction between the special regime in Alsace and the Moselle and French republican legislation elsewhere, Edouard Herriot announced, his intention to enforce all anticlerical republican legislation throughout France, including the Moselle and Alsace. Herriot's announcement had disastrous consequences, mobilizing a Catholic reaction in France which emanated from the returned provinces and resulted, first, in Herriot's capitulation on all aspects of anticlerical legislation, and second, in his resignation of 10 April 1925.

The long-anticipated suppression of the *commissariat général* finally took place on 24 July 1925. Those areas of administration which had not been previously transferred to respective ministries in Paris, fell under the authority of the President himself. However, few were satisfied, either with the way in which matters had been handled, or with the end product. On 1 June 1924, a limit of ten years was set for the completion of the legislative assimilation of the regions into France. A law of 23

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<sup>17</sup> *Le Messin*, 25 May 1925, ADBR 121 AL 154, file marked 'Coupures de presse 1920-1923. Numerous articles demonstrate the perceived weakness of the *commissariat*.



December 1934 prolonged this to 1945. Further laws have since extended this arrangement, without ever addressing or questioning the transitional nature of the regime. French legislation was never systematically introduced to the regions, and the main, politically sensitive areas, in particular religion, education, judicial matters, and social insurance, have remained largely untouched since 1918. These inter-related areas will now be addressed in more detail, in order to assess why they played such a key role in creating stumbling blocks for the smooth integration of the Moselle into France.

### *Education*

As Jean Kieffer has shown in his recent study of primary education in the Moselle, at any one time during the inter-war period, at least half of the region's population was affected by issues concerning primary education once parents, teachers, and pupils had been taken into account.<sup>18</sup> It was the extent of such public interest which inflated the importance of problems created by the sudden changes effected in the classroom by the new French authorities. These difficulties concerned principally primary education and centred on two overlapping areas, those of language and religion. French policy regarding education stated that the *méthode directe* should be employed in all primary schools in the region. This system involved the use of French in all aspects of teaching, prohibiting translation into either the local dialect (*Muttersprache*), or German. The objective was that children should be surrounded by the French language whilst at school, and therefore distanced from the German language and culture. This policy was clearly the result of the desire of the French authorities to remove swiftly all traces of Germanisation, and, as they saw it, to return the provinces to their pre-annexation

state. However, their actions were also interpreted as an attempt to suppress not only German, but also the local dialect, and with it local culture and traditions. In 1920, the weekly government publication, *La Correspondance de Strasbourg* (*Strassburger Correspondenz*), itself published in French and German, set out the principles for teaching language in the schools around the region. It stated that ‘dire que le français doit être la langue essentielle, c’est dire que nos élèves doivent recevoir une culture française.’<sup>19</sup> The text goes on to state that language and the development of the mind are intrinsically linked, and, for this reason, the use of German and similar, Germanic dialects should be avoided in all schools. The objective was for children to leave school able to ‘comprendre autrement qu’en gros les journaux français, lire avec plaisir et profit les livres français, suivre les manifestations de la pensée française, et par là participer à la vie intellectuelle et morale du peuple français.’<sup>20</sup> The *Correspondance* went on to state that language imposed a way of thinking in a child. ‘Si on leur donne la forme allemande, on compromet l’avenir et l’on condamne peut-être la pensée de l’enfant à se développer selon les formes de la langue et de la pensée allemandes.’ A subsequent issue of *La Correspondance de Strasbourg* addressed the question of the *méthode directe*, stating that pupils should not just speak French, but think in French too.

Admettre que la langue française doit être la langue  
préponderante en Alsace et Lorraine [...], c’est admettre  
que nos élèves doivent penser directement en  
français.[...] Or, admettre cela c’est aussi [...] par une

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<sup>18</sup> Kieffer, *L’Enseignement primaire mosellan*, p.68.

<sup>19</sup> *La Correspondance de Strasbourg. Strassburger Correspondenz*, 1920, No.6, 5 February, pp.39-40. ADM, 22 Z 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



conséquence nécessaire, admettre le principe de la  
méthode directe.<sup>21</sup>

However, not everyone accepted that the predominant language should be French, if this meant losing or marginalizing the *Muttersprache*. Several hours a week of German were taught, for, it was claimed, ‘economic’ reasons, as it was recognized that German would be required by some school-leavers seeking employment. However, this did little to help pupils who came from homes where only the local dialect was spoken. For them, *Hochdeutsch* was just as foreign as French. Ultimately this policy had unfortunate long-term consequences for the Moselle’s schoolchildren, many of whom emerged from their early years having mastered neither French nor German. To their ears, both remained foreign languages. Documents, gathered for an exhibition commemorating the 1918 armistice in St Avold, include an account written by Emile Jochum, born in 1906 during annexation. At the end of his account, he apologized for his poor French. ‘Excusez mes fautes et les maladroites de ma rédaction. Je n’ai bénéficié que de 18 mois d’école française. Et cela est déjà un exploit.’<sup>22</sup> For most of Emile’s life, he lived in a country whose official language sounded foreign and unfamiliar. Ultimately, it was the stubbornness of the partisans of bilingualism in resisting attempts to bring the Moselle’s education system in line with the rest of France, as well as French insistence on immediately employing the unpopular and rigid *méthode directe*, which resulted, at least for the younger generations, in an unsatisfactory state of affairs from which it took the Moselle many years to recover.

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<sup>21</sup> *La Correspondance de Strasbourg*, 1920, No.9, 17 February, p.63. ADM, 22 Z 1.

<sup>22</sup> Archives municipales de St Avold, account entitled, ‘Emile Jochum alias Youbilé écrit à Brassorama’.

The only area where the *méthode directe* was not applied was in religious education, which was allocated four hours per week in the school curriculum. Here, the teacher was allowed to decide for herself or himself in which language the subject should be taught, up to the stage at which pupils' knowledge of French was sufficient for them to properly appreciate the content of the lessons. This was interpreted by some as a concession to partisans of bilingualism. However, in reality, the reason such partisans preferred that the use of German or the *Muttersprache* be made compulsory, was in order to inhibit many teachers from the French interior from 'poaching' teaching posts from local *mosellan* teachers.<sup>23</sup> In the long term, this state of affairs did not promise well for those seeking to increase the numbers of *Mosellans* in posts of responsibility within the administration of their region in the future. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, enthusiasm was high among adults in the Germanophone indigenous population to learn French. Classes were set up around the region. Teachers were drafted in and class numbers were high. The municipal archives in Thionville contain a 'Liste d'inscriptions pour les cours de français de la ville de Thionville' which were held at the *Pensionnat de la Providence*.<sup>24</sup> Of the 30 names listed, 22 were *Mosellan*, four were Alsatian, and three were Luxembourger. Only one was German. Their professions varied widely, and included a railway worker, a policeman, several butchers, a postman, and a hairdresser. However, by 1921, numbers had dropped throughout the region and enthusiasm had died away. Funds to pay teachers were limited, class times were not always convenient for those attending, and it was soon realized that French was, in fact, a very different language from that of the more familiar German. Gradually, classes were canceled due to lack of interest,

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<sup>23</sup> Kieffer, *L'Enseignement primaire mosellan*, p.56.

<sup>24</sup> Archives municipales de Thionville, 19/292.



but not before the likes of Millerand and Alapetite had recognized and acknowledged the effort made by individuals to learn this new and difficult language. They also admitted that the task of learning a new language was especially difficult for the older generations, whose minds, they claimed, were perhaps not as supple as those of their grandchildren.

As well as the difficulties posed by bilingualism in education, the question of confessional schools also created problems. The *Loi Falloux* of 15 March 1850, defining for the whole of France the confessional nature of schools, was still in place in the Moselle in 1918. This meant that religious education, as well as the influence of the specific religious denomination in the everyday running of a school, was still an integral part of state-run educational institutions around the provinces. German legislation on educational matters during annexation had sustained this system, whilst in France, the whole face of education had been altered by the *Lois Ferry* of the 1880s. These laws had severely curtailed the role of religious denominations in schools. The assimilation of the Moselle region into France in 1918 inevitably included the introduction of anticlerical legislation into state education. However, as was explained in a study carried out by Jacques Leblanc and published in 1922, very few within the population of Alsace and the Moselle wished for the immediate introduction of the French educational system which relied heavily upon the existence of private confessional schools for those who wished their children to receive an education according to their religious denomination.<sup>25</sup> In the Moselle and Alsace, there were only 69 such schools, compared to 2,841 state-run schools. Clearly, the pre-existing system of private education could not cope with the demand, which would result from

the application of the Ferry laws in the region, a region for whose population religion played such a vital role.

Early on in the French administration in the regions, it soon became apparent that both religion and bilingualism in schools were issues which should be treated with the utmost tact and sensitivity, affecting, as they did, so many within the population. On 17 October 1919, the law confirming the provisional nature of the overall regime also confirmed that legislation affecting education, which had been in place during annexation, would be maintained. Herriot's rashness in 1924, therefore, came as something of a shock to the populations, and prompted a predictable outcry.

### *Language*

The question of linguistic integration rapidly became an issue, because of its role in administration, judicial matters, politics, and legislation, as well as education.

However, it seems it was never an issue in its own right, that is, a problem which demanded from the administration, or the Paris government, separate attention. In fact, in 1923, the Marquess of Crewe noted that, in his judgment, the question of language itself was unlikely to produce any serious difficulty in the assimilation process. Indeed, he claimed that some within Government circles regretted that, due to the war, the German language was now so marginalized in schools and universities nationwide that very few students took classes in it.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, throughout the more recent history of the provinces, there had always been a linguistic policy. Under French sovereignty up to 1871, the policy had been one

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<sup>25</sup> Leblanc, J., *La Liberté de l'enseignement en Alsace et Lorraine*, Paris, 1922, cited in Lord Hardinge's report sent from Paris to the Foreign Office in London, 14 October 1922. PRO, FO 371/8259, p.116.

<sup>26</sup> The Marquess of Crewe to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 13 October 1923. PRO FO 371/9391, p.155.



of *francisation*, and during German annexation, one of Germanisation. Both nations adhered to the idea that sentiment followed language. However, in September 1919, the *sous-préfet* of Boulay sent a report to the *commissaire* in Metz expressing his satisfaction at finding generally among the populations, ‘un ardent patriotisme, un réel attachement à la France et à la République’.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, though, he went on, ‘la langue française est presque totalement ignorée’. The *sous-préfet* recommended, therefore, that the development of the French language in such Germanophone, rural districts, be an exercise ‘de patience; de méthode, et de tact’. Likewise, the *Journal de Forbach* published an article 22 May 1919 on the subject.<sup>28</sup> It stated that it was essential for French to be taught in the Germanophone sector of the Moselle region, in order that inhabitants could ‘participer à la vie entière: spirituelle, politique et matérielle de la France’. However, in these regions, the German language ‘fait partie du coeur et de l’esprit de l’homme; et c’est un avantage aussi de posséder les deux langues’. Despite this, there has never been a linguistic statute in the provinces designed to protect linguistic traditions, or local dialects. Yet, neither has there been any series of laws designed to regulate the use of an official language in all areas of everyday life. This was all the more surprising due to the importance laid by both nation states upon the use of a national language as a means of defining and reaffirming national identity and sentiment. Indeed, both German and French administrations banned the use of the ‘other’ language in certain areas, but this never took the form of a blanket policy or law. There were numerous loopholes in linguistic legislation, inadequacies as well as oversights, which meant that exceptions were made, officially as well as unofficially. Under the French administration following integration in 1918,

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<sup>27</sup> Report sent to the *commissaire de la République* in Metz from Boulay, 11 September 1919. ADBR 121 AL 91.

for example, all publicity concerning elections could be presented in both French and German, and the official bulletin for the region's administration was also published in both languages. Bilingualism was sometimes accepted in advertisements and announcements, but only if French came first.

Overall, the French, after 1918, appear to have acted more hastily than the Germans did after the Treaty of Frankfurt. Although the two nation states had similar objectives and therefore similar policies, Germany allowed for longer periods of adjustment, gradually phasing out the use of French in administrative, legal, and political matters.<sup>29</sup> The French, even before the Treaty of Versailles was signed, introduced the use of the French language into judicial matters with immediate effect. And as detailed above, the use of the *méthode directe* in primary education was also introduced immediately by the French, but not the Germans. Again, it can be argued that the circumstances of *annexion* in 1871, and *désannexion* 47 years later, were simply so dissimilar that drawing comparisons is both unhelpful and unwise. The French authorities needed speedy results in the integration process, in order that the myth of Alsace-Lorraine should not appear to have been contradicted. Public opinion within the French interior certainly had high expectations. And likewise, certain seemingly ill-informed politicians under-estimated the extent of the task before them. In any case, statistics show that in the Moselle, despite its large Francophone areas, 73.5 per cent of the population indicated German as their mother tongue by 1910,

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<sup>28</sup> Article entitled, 'La question des langues dans les écoles primaires des régions de l'Alsace et de Lorraine où on parle allemand', *Journal de Forbach*, 22 May 1919.

<sup>29</sup> In 1892, Germany had limited the number of communes where French was the accepted official language to 3 in Upper-Alsace, 22 in Lower-Alsace, and 286 in annexed Lorraine, 311 in total. However, by 1911, the total number for the whole of Alsace-Lorraine had only been reduced to 291. *Office de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 3ième année, 1921, Strasbourg, p.21.



whereas only 22.3 per cent indicated French.<sup>30</sup> The figures reflect the fact that in 1910, the indigenous population of the Moselle represented only 67.4 per cent of the total population, compared to 85.8 per cent in the Haut-Rhin and 88.7 per cent in the Bas-Rhin.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, Germany had left France with a sizeable community of German nationals among the regions' populations, as well as the prospect of a long and difficult period of linguistic *francisation*. Many had considered the task to be limited to the two departments of Alsace. However, as these figures show, the Moselle had complications of its own, including the arrival of large numbers of foreign workers speaking neither French nor German.

Obviously, the complexities of the situation inhibited the implementation of blanket policies regarding the official language of the Moselle region following the events of 1918, especially when it came to legislation. However, there were certain consequences. For example, all national laws introduced to the regions were always written in the sovereign's national language. Texts of local laws, on the other hand, were always introduced in both French and German. By not fully replacing with their French equivalents all the German and local laws, which had been put in place in Alsace and the Moselle prior to 1918, the legislation began to look somewhat like a patchwork quilt. To this day, the original texts of certain German laws which were not replaced, remain in German. Any translations of these texts into French do not constitute the original law itself, and therefore cannot replace that law. So, when the

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<sup>30</sup> *Office de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, 3ième année, 1921, Strasbourg, p.22. However, it should be noted that in Château-Salins, for example, the figure for those speaking French as their mother tongue was 68.4%. The regional disparity was therefore yet another problem. In Upper Alsace, French was considered the mother tongue of 6.1% of the population and in Lower Alsace, a mere 3.8% of the population.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6. Equally, as a percentage of the total population of the Moselle in 1910, only 73.2% had been born in Alsace-Lorraine compared to 87.4% of Lower Alsace and 90.3% of Upper Alsace.

law has to be verified, for whatever judicial reason, it is the German original which has to be consulted, not a French translation.

In this sea of legal intricacies between the French and German languages, it is easy to see how there was, in fact, no real place for the multiple regional dialects which had thrived over the centuries, despite the dominance of German to the east, and French to the west. Language for the nation states, was a symbol of national allegiance, an instrument with which one could manipulate national sentiment. However, it was a blunt instrument which took little care of centuries of tradition and a carefully nurtured culture. Equally, bilingualism was distrusted and disregarded by France and Germany, both of whom viewed it as a means of watering down, if not of compromising, their respective national cultures, as well as weakening their overall control of the populations concerned. Neither viewed it simply as an inevitable feature of borderlands whose heritage simply ran deeper than that of the modern nation state. Few, in Paris at least during the initial integration process, were willing to ignore language as the principal indicator of sentiment, despite most observers' impression. There was little evidence to suggest that the majority of Alsatians and *Mosellans* accepted French rule, even if this was only due to the absence of a better alternative. German speakers were persistently branded as *Boche* by those arriving from the French interior, with high-ranking officials openly using the term in letters and documents. *Le Messin* newspaper demanded that 'les fonctionnaires venus de tous les coins de la France pour conquérir la France ... cessent de nous traiter comme pays conquis et de nous appeler Boches ainsi que cela se passe journellement.'<sup>32</sup> The disappointment and

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in a report by Mirman, 13 September 1919. ADBR 121 AL 91. Mirman was, in fact, as guilty as any of the *haut fonctionnaires* of freely using the term *Boche* when referring to *indigènes* who were unable to speak French.



disillusionment for so many caught within this linguistic paradox was to manifest itself in the *malaise lorrain*.

### *The religious question*

The 'religious question' in Alsace and the Moselle was arguably the most potentially explosive issue in the overall process of integration. Evidence for this statement can clearly be seen in the reaction, in 1924, to Herriot's attempt to abolish the regions' special religious status. Andrée Viollis, writing in 1928, even went so far as to claim that the religious question was the principal cause of the *malaise lorrain*.<sup>33</sup> The difficulty which religion posed for integration of the provinces into France centred on the question of the removal of the 1801 *Concordat*, and the implementation of the Laic Laws in its place, laws which had been introduced into France in 1905. Why, then, did the idea of bringing in line the returned provinces with the rest of France arouse such widespread resistance?

Some accounts of the period point to the very high percentage of Catholics in the Moselle as an explanation for this reaction. By 1926 Catholics made up 92.4 per cent of the Moselle's population.<sup>34</sup> This implies that it was Catholics, more than Protestants and Jews, who sought to defend most vigorously the special religious status within the regions.<sup>35</sup> However, 28.4 per cent of the population of the Bas-Rhin was Protestant, where equally strong resistance to the removal of the religious statute was voiced. Perhaps, then, the problem lay not in the breakdown of the population into sects, but in the extent to which the population practised religion combined with the importance of the role religion played in individuals' lives. In both the Moselle and

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<sup>33</sup> Viollis, *Alsace et Lorraine au-dessus des passions*.

<sup>34</sup> See table 3, p.42.

Alsace, prior to annexation, the proportion of the population practising religion had remained high in both rural and urban areas. There had been little evidence of a drifting away within any sect, something which was only reinforced by the dramatic political events of the 1870s. During annexation, many considered the clergy, in particular the Catholic clergy, to have provided the leadership and stability which many among the Francophile populations felt they had lost with the departure of their *classes dirigeantes*. In fact, it was, to a certain extent, thanks to the clergy that the memory of France was kept alive during the regions' separation from *la mère patrie*. Following 1918, with the shift of much of the German population back to Germany, the regions' *classes dirigeantes* once again departed leaving, for a second time, the Catholic clergy to provide any sense of continuity, community, and stability for the populations.

Whilst these aspects of religious practice and the role of the clergy are relevant, it appears the key to the problem lay, once again, in the question of expectations as much as in religion itself. In 1914, whilst the future appeared unarguably German, the populations had no reason to adapt themselves to the idea of the removal of the *Concordat*. Even in 1918, they still did not anticipate any major changes to their religious statute. They had, after all, been promised, by the French, protection and respect for their traditions, institutions, and beliefs. From these promises, therefore, they understood that the role of religion in their everyday lives would remain unaffected. The French population, on the other hand, had been given longer to adapt to the idea of separating the Church from the State. They had had time to understand that such a separation was intended not to defeat the role of the Church, but, in some

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<sup>35</sup> Lord Crewe's assessment of the Protestant and Jewish press led him to draw this conclusion in his despatch from Paris to the Foreign Office in London, PRO, FO 371/10545, p.237.



ways, to reinforce and redefine the Church's role in society.<sup>36</sup> For the returned provinces in 1918, French intentions for their swift assimilation with France left little or no time for adaptation. Lord Hardinge remarked in his monthly report of December 1922, that Alsace and the Moselle were not as dissimilar to France on the religious front as some might suggest. He claimed that although France employed an anticlerical policy, expressing an attitude which was at times "violently sceptical", this did not implicitly deny that France had also a "deeply mystical Christian" side. The two survived side by side within the one nation and, 'with tact and patience all the apparent difficulties connected with confessional schools and the *Concordat* may be gradually overcome'.<sup>37</sup>

But was Lord Hardinge rather too optimistic in his belief that matters could be resolved in such a way? There appeared to be very little time available for tact or patience in the early days of the new French administration which had chosen a method of integration envisaging sweeping measures, rather than a softly softly approach. Too rapid a centralization and departmentalization of the provinces, as well as the general desire to assimilate swiftly the regions' legislation and administration with the rest of France, were the initial mistakes made by the French administration. Yet, in the early stages, there was no direct mention made by the new authorities of any specific changes to the religious statute itself. The initial mistakes brought with them the threat of the removal of the *Concordat* and the *Loi Falloux*, and it was this perceived threat in the early stages of integration which appears to have caused many of the difficulties.

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<sup>36</sup> In fact, during the war, attitudes in France had improved towards the clergy due to the impressive contribution made by young clergymen involved in frontline fighting. After the end of the war, public opinion recognized the small, but significant, role they had played in the French war effort. Equally, during the war, the Laic Laws had been, to a certain extent, relaxed in order to accommodate the spiritual needs of the people in such difficult and distressing circumstances. It was not until 1924 that Herriot ventured to 'tighten up' their application throughout France. Inevitably, this met with opposition from the Catholic Church.

The 'assimilation brutale' of Jeanneney and Maringer, which gave the earliest hint that the *concordat* was in danger, was followed by Millerand's 'appeasement', something which Alapetite inherited and pursued over the following four years. During this period, the *Bloc national* avoided studiously the religious question, preferring to deal with the many less sensitive issues of integration, and postponing indefinitely the removal of the *Concordat* and confessional schools. It was only in 1924, therefore, that the first, direct attack on the religious status of the regions was made. At the time, not everyone was convinced that Herriot really intended an immediate implementation of the Republic's specifically anticlerical legislation. But his ministerial declaration of 17 June 1924 was worded in such a way that it was seen as the beginning of a socialist *Kulturkampf*. The section of the statement which referred to Alsace and the Moselle read,

Le gouvernement [...] réalisera la suppression du  
commissariat général et préparera les mesures qui  
permettront, en respectant les situations acquises, en  
menageant les intérêts matériels et moraux de la  
population, d'introduire en Alsace et en Lorraine  
l'ensemble de la législation républicaine.<sup>38</sup>

Herriot himself appears to have been completely taken aback by the violent opposition to his proposals, both in the recovered regions and in France as a whole.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it was not at all surprising that such measures should be rejected in the Moselle and Alsace. Out of 24 deputies representing the regions in the French parliament, only

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<sup>37</sup> PRO, FO 371/8259, pp.152-153.

<sup>38</sup> Published in *Le Temps*, 22nd June 1924, in an article entitled 'Le gouvernement, l'Alsace et la Lorraine'.



one communist deputy was a member of the *Cartel des gauches* government. A total of 21 of the remaining 23 deputies belonged to the *Bloc national*, now in opposition, undoubtedly an indication that the regions' populations favoured a continuation of the policy of postponement. In reality, Herriot was simply pressing on with the policies which the *Bloc national* government had been pursuing, albeit tentatively, during the early 1920s. The British Consul-General in Strasbourg even suggested in his letter of 24 June 1924 that, 'this trouble need never have become so acute if it [the religious question] had been resolutely faced at an earlier date: postponement has only made it worse and ... strengthened the extremist feeling on both sides'.<sup>40</sup> He went on to state that, 'it is conceivable that if Monsieur Poincaré had done exactly what Monsieur Herriot proposes to do he could have done it without meeting so much opposition'.<sup>41</sup> This, of course, does not excuse Herriot's ignorance on the subject of the Moselle and Alsace. Had he been better informed, and perhaps more willing to acknowledge the impressive progress already made within the regions since integration, his plans might have taken into consideration the all important question of *transition*. However, Herriot, like Clemenceau in 1918, had to think of his coalition government, as well as public opinion in the French interior, and not just that of the local populations. So, once again, the needs of the periphery were neglected in favour of the greater need presented by 'core' considerations and politics.

In January 1925, Herriot was forced to back down on the question of the religious statute, and he announced that the *Concordat* should remain in place in the returned provinces. The remaining areas of law and administration still had to be

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<sup>39</sup> Becker and Berstein, *Victoire et frustrations*, p.263. In fact, Herriot appears to have been pushed into making these anti-clerical statements by those around him. See Jeanneney, *Leçon d'histoire d'une gauche au pouvoir*, p.64.

<sup>40</sup> PRO, FO 371/10545, p.216. Letter from the Consul-General in Strasbourg to the British Ambassador in Paris.

transferred to Paris, and, equally, the suppression of the *commissariat général* had to be arranged. A meeting between Herriot and the prefects, senators and deputies of the three departments was held on 7 November 1924, and an agreement was reached on the less sensitive issues concerning assimilation, but no fixed date was agreed for completion of these matters. However, as a result of the crusade-like defense of the religious statute in the provinces, the *Concordat* remains in place to this day, something which continues to surprise *Français de l'intérieur* arriving in the region, who believe France discarded Napoleon's religious arrangement long ago. Ultimately, the greatest significance of the furore which followed Herriot's proposals in 1924, was the strengthening of support for the autonomist and *particulariste* movements in both the Moselle and Alsace. Certainly, the manner of opposition to the crisis varied between the two provinces, some considering the response from the Moselle as having been more muted than that of Alsace. Yet, there is no evidence to suggest that *Mosellans* were any less concerned about the preservation of the *Concordat* or confessional schools than Alsatians. As was argued above, both education and linguistic difficulties, as well as the religious question, were major contributors to the widely felt *malaise lorrain* in the region. Indeed, it was the great Europeanist, and one of the Moselle's leading political representatives, Robert Schuman, who was responsible for many of the most hard-hitting attacks on Herriot's ministerial declaration, attacks made in the press as well as in the French parliament. In June 1924, for example, he stated,

Les gouvernements qui se sont succédé depuis 1918 ont  
tous confirmé et solennellement réitéré les promesses  
faites pendant la guerre au nom de la nation française.

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<sup>41</sup> PRO, FO 371/10545, p.217.



Nous ne pouvons nous attendre à voir le gouvernement  
exposer un programme d'avenir, qui est en contradiction  
formelle avec les programmes sur lesquels ont été élus les  
sept huitièmes des représentants des départements  
intéressés.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, the religious problem in the Moselle and Alsace clearly illustrates the extent to which the process of integration had been under-estimated by successive governments following the end of the war. Herriot's proposals triggered an outpouring of regionalist emotion, which drew attention to all areas of dissatisfaction felt among the populations, including linguistic policy and educational policy, as well as changes to legislation affecting the regions.

### *Legislative assimilation*

Legislative assimilation in the returned provinces was not a direct cause of the *malaise lorrain*, with the obvious exceptions of legislation concerning education, language, and religion, as well as legislative changes proposed for social security arrangements in the provinces. However, this process was not without its difficulties. Assimilation was a highly technical exercise which required the skills and patience of experts in all fields of law, from commercial and civil law to the penal code. The complexities of linguistic legislation have already been illustrated above and it has also been shown that by 1925, legislative assimilation was by no means complete. What will be discussed here, though, are the broad problems which the *commissariat général* faced in assimilating the legislation of the provinces with that of the rest of France, and how these problems were resolved.

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<sup>42</sup> 'Le gouvernement, l'Alsace et la Lorraine', in *Le Temps*, 22 June 1924.

The legislation of Alsace and the Moselle can be divided into four different categories. The first concerns national laws put in place by the French administration prior to 1870; the second concerns local laws put in place in the regions also prior to 1870; the third concerns national laws brought in by the German administration during annexation; and the fourth concerns local laws which were implemented during annexation, and which applied only to the *Reichsland*. This meant that contrary to what some within the new French administration thought, the legislation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1918 was not completely German. In fact, purely German legislation was only to be found in a limited number of specific areas, such as social security. Otherwise, many local and French laws remained untouched throughout annexation, of which Napoleon's 1801 *Concordat* was the most notable.

There were numerous reasons why France was unable immediately to draw the provinces' legislation in line with French legislation, the most important of which was the sheer size of the task. Clearly there were other, more pressing, aspects of integration requiring urgent attention, and, in any case, chaos would have resulted from the over-hasty introduction of a complex set of new laws. Beyond these practical considerations, it was quickly pointed out that certain laws within France had already been ear-marked for change, laws which were outdated and therefore in need of modernization, but which had not yet been amended. There was no sense in applying such laws in the returned provinces, only to replace them in the provinces shortly afterwards. Furthermore, the cost of the whole, laborious exercise had to be taken into consideration, so that the process could be planned accordingly. However, there are two crucial reasons why the French administration hesitated in this process of assimilation. Certain German laws simply had no equivalent in French legislation, and so there was little point in removing them. More importantly, however, many German



laws were more modern than, and indeed superior to, those employed within France. If this was not immediately obvious in 1918 to the likes of Jeanneney in Paris or Maringer in Strasbourg, it certainly was to the populations of Alsace and the Moselle, and, in fact, had been one of the observations of the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine* in the final stages of the war. The areas of legislation which were either superior to French law, or had no equivalent with which to replace them, were those concerning *sécurité sociale* (social security), *régime des sociétés* (company law), *livre foncier* (property rights), and *liberté communale* (municipal by-laws). As Woehrling states, application of the French equivalents of these laws would, for Alsace and the Moselle, have been 'une véritable régression'.<sup>43</sup>

In order that certain local and German laws be removed and French laws put in their place, the process had to be brought before the French parliament. This was time-consuming, and so it was agreed that in urgent cases the change-over could be done by decree. As it turned out, most cases were deemed urgent, and, with the exception of the most important laws, most were introduced by decree between 1919 and 1924. Commissions were set up in order to examine the four *grands codes* requiring attention: penal law, civil law, commercial law, and civil procedure. Specialists in these specific areas were then recruited to sit on the commissions. Although these commissions were obliged to follow closely the guidelines for allowing certain laws to remain, namely those with no equivalent in French law, or which were technically superior to French law, or those likely to become part of French law, there were still instances where the commissions had to resort to creating a *troisième*

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<sup>43</sup> Woehrling, Jean-Marie, *Perspectives sur le droit local, Alsace-Moselle*, Strasbourg, 1987, p.8. This is one of the most critical and comprehensive treatments of local law, and its formation from annexation through to present day.

*législation*.<sup>44</sup> This 'third legislation' consisted of a series of new laws which were unique to the returned provinces, and which took the best from both French and German law. Examples of this can be seen in civil and commercial law.

As far as the Moselle was concerned, a swift solution to the assimilation of commercial law was urgently required. It was quickly realized within the region that commerce and industry were at a disadvantage in attempting to function within French markets, whilst being governed by a different set of laws and regulations. This, along with resistance to the concept of a 'third legislation', was symptomatic of the general feeling within the Moselle that Alsatian *particularistes* were only interested in emphasising and protecting the regions' differences with France, rather than seeking a sensible compromise between brutal assimilation and protection of local interests. In fact, the Metz bar declared at their assembly on 30 September 1922 that the idea of a 'third legislation' was unacceptable, stating they wished to see 'ou bien la procédure locale, ou bien la procédure française, mais l'une ou l'autre'.<sup>45</sup> They voted a motion requesting the immediate introduction of French civil and commercial law, but the maintenance of local laws of procedure.

Just as the *Concordat* remains in place today, so the complexities of the legal status of Alsace and the Moselle remain. The *Institut du droit local alsacien-mosellan* was created to deal with the exceptional nature of the local statute and with the ongoing process of assimilation, a process which shows few signs of reaching a conclusion. Philip Simpson has likened the *droit local* of Alsace and the Moselle to Scottish law, stating that

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>45</sup> Créhange, Michel, Maître, 'Les barreaux d'Alsace-Moselle au temps des années vingt', presented at the *Colloque de droit local*, 1 June 1994.



Even if Scottish law, like that of Alsace-Lorraine, has, on occasion, been neglected, it has, nonetheless, always been recognized as constituting a distinctive system of law, a system which has brought rise to a distinctive set of problems.<sup>46</sup>

Just as the laws remain today, so do the problems.

### *Français de l'intérieur*

It was inevitable in 1918 and 1919 that the integration of Alsace and the Moselle would be a labour-intensive exercise, involving the need for large numbers of French nationals brought in from the French interior. The first to arrive were, of course, the military: officers as well as ordinary soldiers. They carried out the task of occupying the provinces, ensured the departure of all German soldiers, restored calm, law and order to the regions, and then set about the *francisisation* of the populations. The military had certainly been warned about what to expect upon their arrival in Alsace and the Moselle. In 1914, in the course of the hostilities, a small corner of south western Alsace, including the towns of Thann, Masevaux, and Dannemarie, was occupied by French troops. Certain specific problems of integration had been experienced by those involved in the process. For example, few within the population were able to speak French, and, likewise, few among the French soldiers or officers were able to speak German.<sup>47</sup> Difficulties and disillusionment, therefore, rapidly set in

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<sup>46</sup> Simpson, P.J.D., 'Le droit écossais au royaume-uni', in *Etat régions et droits locaux*, Strasbourg, 1997.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note, however, that France was forced to respect international conventions in this region because of the risk of German reprisals elsewhere in occupied France. Furthermore, the reality of administering a region where most of the population spoke only German, or a German dialect, and where German rather than French law was in use, meant the French authorities were obliged to assemble one of the most highly qualified groups of administrators of all time in order to handle the

on both sides. Yet, despite the acknowledgment of these difficulties by the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine*, it appears few lessons were learnt, or rather acted upon, following the signing of the armistice in 1918. Although the Moselle's population included a sizeable Francophone population, events in 1918 were not dissimilar to events elsewhere in Alsace. With the exception of those areas where the French language had remained predominant throughout annexation, much of the region sounded and appeared considerably more German than the incoming military personnel had expected. Once the official and unofficial celebrations had taken place, the nature of 'normal' life was quite unexpected for soldiers and officers alike. It was very hard for many of them to accept that these apparently Germanized populations had, in fact, been worth fighting for, remembering, of course, that the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France had been presented as the primary French war aim. French propaganda produced during the war had not only succeeded in perpetuating the myth about Alsace-Lorraine, but it had also created a deep hatred of Germany, playing on exaggerated images of stereotypical Germans, known as *Boches*, who spoke an unfamiliar and unintelligible language. It was extremely difficult, therefore, for French soldiers to separate the ordinary citizens of the regions from the propaganda images.

The initial experience of the military was similar to that of the incoming civilian population, most of whom were civil servants. Key administrators and their staff were the first to arrive and very soon afterwards, a recruitment programme was initiated in the interior to find replacements for the departing Germans, many of whom had held senior positions in the civil service. In the early stages, very few among the new administration were recruited from the Moselle's population. A notable exception to



this can be seen in the replacement of the German police force, where great care was taken to recruit from the indigenous populations.<sup>48</sup> There were only two possible sources for supplying indigenous manpower to a new *gendarmerie* of the Moselle and Alsace. The first included those *Mosellans* and Alsatians who had been recruited to the French army during the war. This had only been possible for those who had escaped German occupied territory at some point during the war.<sup>49</sup> The French military, in turn, had decided against allowing them to fight in Europe, and so they had joined the French army in Africa. The second source of recruits included *Mosellans* and Alsatians who had been mobilized into the German army, and who had been sent to camps throughout France for the duration of the war. Yet, their desire to embark upon the profession of *gendarme* was by no means assured. In 1917, an officer employed by the *Service des Alsaciens-Lorrains* noted:

Je ne sais trop s'il y aura grande affluence pour cette  
carrière car le paysan aime rentrer pour cultiver sa terre;  
l'ouvrier rejoindra sa fabrique où les salaires sont très  
élevés. Les commerçants eux aussi trouveront des  
emplois plus rémunérateurs. On n'est pas sans ignorer  
[sic.] que les gendarmes étaient bien mieux payés que les  
gendarmes français.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, this new French police force was to be responsible for creating and consolidating French sentiment in the returned provinces. But, how many of the region's indigenous population were in a position to provide this aspect of the

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<sup>48</sup> See Philippot, Georges, Général (C.R.), 'Gendarmerie et identité nationale en Alsace et Lorraine après 1918', in *Revue historique des armées*, No. 4, 1998, pp.61-78.

<sup>49</sup> Those from the area around Thann, Masevaux, and Dannemarie, the area which was occupied by the French army in 1914, fell into this category.

integration process? The solution to this problem did not, however, lie in recruiting *Français de l'intérieur*, as it was essential that *gendarmes* spoke the required languages and dialects. Likewise, a police force recruited from the interior would have been very poorly received by *indigènes*. In the end, a centre for training *gendarmes* was set up in Strasbourg, following preparations made towards the end of the war, and was run by Lieutenant-colonel Albert Michel, an 'Alsacien, Français et Gendarme'. His task was to train recruits to become *gendarmes*, as well as to teach them the French language and instruct them in French culture and patriotism.

In other areas of administration, by early 1919, significant numbers of *Français de l'intérieur* had arrived and were trying to make some sense of the situation. They felt greatly inconvenienced by the practical differences and difficulties they encountered in the regions. For example, despite the departure of thousands of Germans from the city of Metz, the incoming French found it hard to obtain furnished accommodation. In a letter to Mirman, Captain Langrogne of the French army suggested that furnished properties belonging to expelled Germans should be made available to those seeking accommodation in Metz, as a short-term solution to this frustrating problem.<sup>51</sup> Equally, the complicated differences between legal systems, pay levels, and the continuation of the use of local statutes in all areas of life, took the incoming French some time to understand and accept, even though in many cases, *Français de l'intérieur* were often paid higher salaries than *indigènes*.

Initially, each side viewed the other with suspicion. In 1921, the British Consul-General in Strasbourg noted that the arriving French had swiftly come to the conclusion they were in 'an unfriendly region'. He also stated that, 'intemperate

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<sup>50</sup> Philippot, 'Gendarmerie et identité nationale', in *Revue historique des armées*, No. 4, 1998, pp.61-78, p.64.



behaviour on the part of a few newly arrived Frenchmen is having a bad effect'.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, combined with the 'intemperate behaviour' of the likes of Maringer in Strasbourg and Mirman in Metz, whose tact did not always flow as freely as their anti-German sentiment, the undoubted arrogance of some of the incoming French created a very poor impression indeed. Equally, the returned populations were highly sensitive during those early days. They had suffered greatly under German rule and were anxious to see early signs of a favourable contrast between the French and German administrations and administrators. A number of newspapers and journals quickly picked up on the early instances of tactless behaviour on the part of the incoming French. This publicity only served as further damning evidence against the new administration, adding to the mounting criticism of the swift centralization of the regions' administration to Paris, as well as the French government's desire to implement immediately French legislation. Things were not going according to expectations for either side. It is therefore not at all surprising that any instances of apparent insensitivity towards the indigenous population, should be interpreted in the blackest of terms.

Equally, any French arriving in the regions were immediately confronted with an indigenous population which, on the face of it, appeared to demand the perpetuation of a German-style state with German administrative methods, German legislation, and the German language. There were also cases of outright hostility from certain sections of the indigenous population, one of which was reported in the French-language newspaper the *Thionvillois*. The article, which appeared on 8 July 1920, is entitled, 'Les effets de la campagne anti-Nouveaux venus', and in smaller print, 'Après la

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<sup>51</sup> ADM, 304 M 214.

<sup>52</sup> Report from Strasbourg to the British Foreign Office, PRO, FO 371/6990, p.200.

bombe de Hagondange c'est maintenant le gâteau empoisonné à Metz'. The article describes how the *Thionvillois* had reported on previous occasions, but did not condone, recent attacks in Metz on *Français de l'intérieur*. These attacks, it claims, were the result of campaigns in the German-language press designed to spread hatred among the indigenous populations towards French civil servants with slogans such as, 'Gens venus de Paris, comme jadis on se défendait contre ceux venus de Berlin!'. A bomb had apparently exploded at the house of a French factory owner in Hagondange and two French teachers at a lycée for girls had received hate-mail telling them to leave the region. A cake was later delivered to them, laced with poison.

These initial 'public relations' difficulties were, in some respects, inevitable. It should still be asked, however, whose responsibility was it to ensure harmony during the initial period of contact between the two populations? Pétain, during the war, warned he did not wish to hear of any insulting behaviour on the part of his soldiers towards the indigenous populations. But who was to instruct the civil servants and civilian populations arriving from the interior, populations which had trusted their government's propaganda and which had been told the provinces were 'more French than the French'? It was not until the arrival of Millerand, with his soothing speeches and appeasing tactics, that order and a reflective calm could be returned to the realm of public opinion. It was he who broke the vicious circle of spite and misunderstandings between populations, whose expectations had been raised by events well outwith their control. The excitement for the indigenous population of being returned to France, and the excitement for the incoming French of reintegrating the lost provinces into *la mère patrie*, was swiftly dampened by reality. The desire among most *Mosellans* to become part of France was genuine enough. However, the ironing-out process was to be far more complicated and time-consuming than any of them expected. Language



continued to play its part in dictating prejudice between the *Français de l'intérieur* and the *indigènes*, creating a barrier which took years to lower, despite the sincere, though somewhat short-lived, efforts of the region's Germanophone populations to learn the French language, and, in some small way, discover how, in fact, one could become French.

### *The malaise lorrain*

In March 1922, the newspaper, the *Courrier de Metz*, published an article on its front page which addressed the subject of the 'malaise lorrain vis-à-vis de la mère-patrie'.<sup>53</sup>

Its author concluded that after three years of assimilation,

Par la plume et par la parole, ils [the French authorities]  
n'ont fait que vexer une population qui n'a jamais cessé  
d'être française. Ce n'est pas [...] en s'attaquant à tout  
ce qui constitue la vie morale des Lorrains désannexés  
que l'on réalisera une assimilation intelligente.

The author concluded, 'Assimilateurs de toutes marques, sachez où vous arrêter dans votre travail. Ne vous attaquez pas aux forces morales qui ont fait la grandeur de la France et la force de la Lorraine longtemps annexée.' The greatest problem for the French authorities was that the *malaise lorrain*, the sense of dissatisfaction and unease with the new regime, affected those within the returned provinces who should have been the easiest to assimilate into post-war France. Generally speaking, Francophone *indigènes* in the Moselle tended to be more predisposed to becoming French than

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<sup>53</sup> *Le Courrier de Metz*, 3 March 1922.

Germanophone *Mosellans*.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the manner in which the region was treated during the assimilation process, indicated that their loyalty to France had either not been recognized, or was being ignored. Instead of saluting their loyalty and patriotism towards *la mère patrie*, French assimilationists grouped all Alsace-Lorrainers under the one umbrella, and failed to recognize the various needs of the Moselle's heterogeneous population. The tone of the above article reflected the general frustration and unhappiness of three years of an integration process, which had involved instances of tactlessness, ineptitude, and clumsiness on the part of the new authorities, as well as the realisation that French promises were not going to be kept. The 'mutuelle confiance' engendered during a visit to Metz by Millerand with *Messins* and *Mosellans* alike in May 1919 provided a rare moment of optimism which evaporated as soon as Millerand left office.<sup>55</sup> Victor Demange even created a newspaper as a result of the *malaise lorrain* which had been discussed as early as January 1919. Finding that the French language newspapers, revived after the French occupation of the region in December 1918, were providing only, as he saw it, the French patriotic line, Demange launched his own, German language newspaper, the *Metzer Freies Journal*. The first issue appeared on 19 June 1919. Demange sought to provide, for those less enchanted with the new regime, a newspaper for Germanophone *Mosellans* which dealt with their specific problems in the light of integration and assimilation: problems created by rushed linguistic assimilation, by the arrival of *Français de l'intérieur*. Although this newspaper did not attract many readers among Francophone, Francophile *indigènes*, enjoying instead its success among the Germanophone industrial workforce to the north of Metz, it was a newspaper which expressed the sentiments of many who had

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<sup>54</sup> There are no rules about this, though, and, as has been stated in previous chapters, language and sentiment did not always converge.



been quite glad to see the departure of German rule, but who found themselves alienated by the new regime. Despite the French authorities' belief that Demange was unpatriotic, probably a communist, and that he posed a serious threat to the stability of the region, a belief which resulted in his arrest and brief imprisonment only weeks after the newspaper had been launched, there is little evidence that the paper's content did any more than express the concerns of many among the Germanophone population, concerns which had more to do with the practical issues of day to day life than with questions of patriotism or national sentiment. Indeed, in 1919, Demange and his journalists expressed the same misgivings and concerns which were later to appear in the French language press, as can be seen in the above extract from the *Courrier de Metz*.<sup>56</sup>

Needless to say, attacks in the press on the French administration's progress in assimilating the populations did not go unheeded. Mirman's defence of French actions in his pamphlet *Aux populations lorraines*, written less than a year after the entry of French troops into the region, contains his somewhat feigned surprise that the populations should find so much fault in his, and the administration's, performance.<sup>57</sup> His pamphlet deals systematically with rumours, some clearly outrageous and exaggerated, spread within the regions since November 1918. He claimed he was responding to 'une véritable campagne de dénigrement systématique contre tout ce qui touche à l'administration française et parfois à la France elle-même.' The contents of

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<sup>55</sup> *Le Lorrain*, 28 May 1919.

<sup>56</sup> The *Courrier de Metz* was published only until 1922.

<sup>57</sup> Mirman, L., *Aux populations lorraines*, Metz, 1919. The original letter was written 1 October 1919, six weeks before Mirman's term as *commissaire* ended with his resignation. According to Roth, 'il quitte Metz discrètement sans laisser beaucoup de regrets, semble-t-il'. Roth, 'Un préfet de guerre en Lorraine, Léon Mirman', *Revue administrative de l'Est de la France*, No.16, 1979, pp.5-19, p.17. Mirman was succeeded by François Manceron as prefect of the Moselle. The title of *commissaire de la République* was replaced as of 22 October 1919, even though the *commissariat général* was not suppressed until 1925.

the pamphlet were originally written as a letter sent to the members of a *commission départementale*, which Mirman had decided to offer to a larger audience. Some of the more 'abominable' rumours he cited included the removal of crucifixes from all schools, the beating of the inhabitants of the village of Fleury by French soldiers, and the deportation of children who, it transpired, were not actually being forcibly deported, but given a free trip to Nancy and Paris, courtesy of the French State. However, whilst Mirman found it astonishing that anyone could find fault in his administration's efforts, his often indignant explanations fell upon deaf ears. This is not because the populations were stubbornly inclined to believe the somewhat fantastic rumours, but because there was clearly a basis for their dissatisfaction which Mirman could not deny: the region had been promised a life better than that which they had experienced under German rule; they had been promised protection of their beliefs, traditions, and institutions; they had been promised a reward for their loyalty to France throughout annexation. None of these promises appeared to *indigènes* to have been forthcoming. So when Herriot announced, shortly after the election of the *Cartel des gauches* to power in 1924, that yet another promise was to be broken, the Moselle's populations felt acutely betrayed. Herriot's announcement marked the lowest point in relations between the returned provinces and the French administration. This was manifested in the Moselle by a brief burst of support for autonomism, which, hitherto, had remained centred in Alsace. But, more importantly, the events of 1924 marked the consolidation of an *identité mosellane*, created by the pressures brought to bear on the heterogeneous populations by the French Republic, rather than the consolidation of a *patriotisme française*, which was, after all, the intended outcome of the assimilation process.



### *Concluding remarks*

The *malaise lorrain*, was based on a deepening sense of distrust among the populations. It began within days of the arrival of French administrators from the interior, and reached a climax in the aftermath of Herriot's *Kulturkampf*. France, like Germany, had found it almost impossible to grant the Moselle, let alone Alsace, the freedom it desired to glide gradually into the French nation, and to accommodate the necessary compromises along the way. The distrust, therefore, stemmed from French attempts to remove the aspects of Germanisation, which *Mosellans* had considered successful, such as a modern social security system and a more liberal approach to linguistic, educational, and religious assimilation. It also stemmed from disillusionment which had set in as the various French promises were broken one by one. These promises had raised the expectations of the region's population since *désannexion*, expectations which included the maintenance of certain local and German laws, the rejection of the Republic's religious laws, and the protection of local traditions and cultures. However, in the Moselle the populations did not reject out of hand every aspect of assimilation. Most recognized the need to alter, modify, or accept compromise in certain areas of legislative integration and so the majority of the many changes which were made in the early 1920s passed off without comment or resistance. Again, the desire of so many among the indigenous population to work positively towards assimilation is more evident in the Moselle than it was in Alsace. However, 'ce pauvre malaise' as the *Courrier de Metz* called it, existed in the shadow of an Alsatian *malaise*, and, as a result, was misrepresented and misunderstood. Had the French authorities recognized the need to differentiate between these two provinces, perhaps the difficulties of assimilation and integration could have been

largely avoided, in the Moselle at least. Yet, the administrative aspects of integration were not alone in causing distress and unhappiness among the populations, and in contributing to the *malaise lorrain*. As the next chapter will show, the manner in which the authorities chose to remove those within the populations deemed unreliable or *indésirable* also came in for major criticism.



### *Summary*

The initial period of integration into France for the Moselle was marked, on an administrative level, by friction, misunderstandings, and uncertainty. Among the Francophone sections of the population, eagerness to re-establish direct links with Paris was widespread. However, the initial experience between November 1918 and March 1919 was so unsatisfactory that a return to the *Statthalter* style of administration directed from Strasbourg was seen as the only way to proceed. Millerand's term as *commissaire général* was sadly all too brief (had he remained, how differently would the 1920s have unfolded?) and his successor, although an able administrator, lacked the flair and public appeal necessary to lead the regions through the inevitably difficult years of integration. Whilst the *malaise alsacien* drew international attention, the lesser known *malaise lorrain* developed along similar lines. Issues related to religion, education, language, and the local statute all presented stumbling blocks for the new French regime, which, try as it might, failed to convince the returned populations that a swift and full assimilation with *la mère patrie* on all levels was either necessary or prudent. Compromises were required from both sides, but they were not forthcoming. The *Français de l'intérieur* arrived in their droves, but their disillusionment with the reality of everyday life in the returned provinces brought about disharmony and a sense of mutual distrust between the two populations. In particular, the Francophone sections of the region's population struggled to reconcile their cherished image of the motherland with the actions of the incoming French.

Furthermore, impatience and mismanagement in 1924 on the part of politicians, notably Herriot with his attempt to implement republican laic laws in the provinces, meant the process of integration was once again threatened by French tactlessness. An overzealous desire to suppress regionalism and replace it with centralisation,

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## Chapter V

### *Epuration: expulsion* and voluntary repatriation

Votre frère ne se trouvait toujours pas avec les expulsés  
de St-Avold que je rencontrais et avec lesquels j'eus 7  
heures d'arrêt à Sarrebourg. La joie de ces pauvres gens  
de trouver quelqu'un qui s'intéressait à eux! Qui fera  
partie du prochain convoi? Je me le suis demandé bien  
souvent depuis lors, et quand viendra mon tour?<sup>1</sup>

The author of this letter, sent from Phalsbourg near the border with Alsace and intercepted in January 1919 by the *contrôle postal* in Metz, expresses the acute anxiety and uncertainty felt by many of those civilians of German origin living in the Moselle following the signing of the armistice. The author goes on,

Ici on a commencé aussi les expulsions; samedi prochain  
les 12 premières victimes s'en vont. Vous pensez dans  
quel état d'âme on reste à son poste. Alors qu'il est  
impossible d'avoir un laisser-passer, on est prisonnier au  
vrai sens du mot.

The report which records the above, cites three other letters which all describe a similar sense of despondency among German immigrants. Another correspondent in the same report states, 'Papa a été relevé de ses fonctions aujourd'hui; comment cela

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<sup>1</sup> Château de Vincennes, 16 N 1464, report of the *commission de Contrôle Postal Civil de Metz*, of post read between 13 January and 26 January, 1919, extract 7. It is unclear whether this extract was originally written in French or German, but the latter is more likely. The *Contrôle* employed numerous translators to assist with the task of reading civilian post.

ira-t-il encore? L'expulsion suivra-t-elle?'<sup>2</sup> With the uncertainty came fear: 'On n'ose plus se montrer dans la rue'.<sup>3</sup>

Alfred Wahl, one of very few historians to address French policy towards Germans living in the returned provinces in November 1918, analyses the change in sovereignty, the question of nationality, and the expulsion of Germans, such as those quoted above.<sup>4</sup> Wahl claims that the Treaty of Versailles allowed France to adopt an attitude towards the German immigrant population of the provinces, which was 'bien plus libérale' than that adopted by Germany at the Treaty of Frankfurt. At that time, Wahl claims, Germany had operated sweeping measures which automatically changed the nationality of the indigenous population from French to German. Only those who chose to leave the region were able to retain French nationality. The French, on the other hand, allowed Germans to remain in the regions without forcing a change of nationality upon them. They even accepted that those Germans who wished, could apply for French nationality through the naturalisation process. In the meantime, however, France

procéda à des expulsions individuelles d'éléments qui se livraient à une propagande anti-française. Ces mesures, accompagnées d'abus inévitables, donnèrent l'impression d'une régression du libéralisme alors qu'il n'en était rien.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, Wahl's idea of a 'liberal' approach appears to be at odds with those Germans who feared expulsion from the regions, and dared not show themselves in the street. If only

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Extract 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Report for letters sent to destinations abroad between 6 and 15 January 1919, extract 27.

<sup>4</sup> Wahl, A., 'Changement et Souveraineté et Option et Nationalité', in *Cahier du Cercle Jean Macé*, No.27, Metz, 3rd trimester, 1988, pp.1-10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.10.



those indulging in anti-French propaganda were to be expelled, why were these German immigrants so unsure who would be next? This chapter examines French policy on the question of nationality and German immigrants living in the region, and asks if Wahl's assessment is justified or reasonable.

### *Épuration*

In the weeks, months, and years which followed the end of German rule in the Moselle and Alsace, thousands of inhabitants of the Moselle left the region. Their departure, often voluntary, formed part of a period of *épuration* operated both by the French military and civilian authorities, as well as by many among the indigenous population. The term *épuration* is used in this context to mean the purging, cleansing, or purification of the region and its population of all German or enemy elements. This was at best an unofficial policy, a series of uncoordinated and fluctuating responses to a set of practical problems, themselves in course of evolution and definition. It had no clear starting point, and no single architect. No document officially announced its application amongst the multitude of *arrêtés* and *instructions*, which showered down upon the provinces from December 1918 onwards. Instead, *épuration* was a term which crept into use, a term which increasingly appeared in official papers and titles of newspaper articles, a term which fell, with increasing ease, from the lips of disgruntled *indigènes*, keen to see Germanisation erased and to witness the departure of those who had dominated the regions and their populations for so long. In January 1919, a notice in the *Courrier de Metz* stated the following;

*L'épuration.* Une société s'est constituée à Hayange en vue d'épurer le pays de tous ceux qui durant la guerre se

sont fait remarquer par leurs insultes et grossièretés à l'égard des indigènes.<sup>6</sup>

For the following months, the topic of *épuration* continued to dominate headlines. *Le Messin* ran an article 3 March 1919 entitled, 'L'épuration de l'Alsace-Lorraine' in its column on 'Questions du jour'.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, in March 1919, the *Thionvillois*, in its review of the press on 21 March 1919, contained a section on 'L'Épuration'.<sup>8</sup>

The term *épuration* has also been translated to mean ethnic cleansing and, in this case, such a translation is arguably valid. However, its use must be qualified. This was nothing remotely like ethnic cleansing of the kind which resorts to mass murder to eliminate, and rape to pollute, entire races. What occurred in Alsace and the Moselle following the armistice of 1918 was largely non-violent, but its objective was to erase (rather than to ignore) all effects of Germanisation, in order to wipe clean the slate, and to carry on as if the half century of German rule had never actually taken place. The problems with such a simplistic objective, as shown in the previous chapter regarding language, religion, education, and legislation, are multiple. German rule had not been superficial, and it could not be lifted, like a heavy cloak, from the minds and lives of the regions' populations. Yet, the new French regime carried on regardless, and the changing of street names and shop signs to French equivalents was one of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Le Courrier de Metz*, 13 January 1919.

<sup>7</sup> *Le Messin*, 8 March 1919.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Thionvillois*, 21 March 1919. Discussion of *Épuration* in the French-language press was common as a means of reinforcing a newspaper's Francophile credentials. Until the *Metzer Freies Journal* appeared in June 1919, little critical comment was made about the expulsion of *indésirables* in any newspaper. No editor wished to appear unpatriotic, or arouse the wrath of the new French authorities. Likewise, no editor wished to risk alienating large numbers of his readers. See *Limits to épuration* below, p.195. The term *épuration* is also used in the *Répertoire numérique détaillé du Fonds du commissariat général de la République 1918-1925*, of the *Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin*, published in 1980, p.117, section E, 'Service Général de police d'Alsace-Lorraine - police et sureté général, épuration - commissions de triage'.



first, very visual achievements of the broader *épuration* process.<sup>9</sup> As the extracts cited from the *contrôle postal* indicate, not all German immigrants wished to leave, and often, though not always, it was the arrival of expulsion orders which forced individuals to make the journey across the new Franco-German frontier, with little more than a suitcase and some small change. Others, for differing reasons, opted for voluntary repatriation, either pre-empting the expulsion orders or accepting that there was no future for them in the region.

### *Classification of the Population*

It was the *abbé* Wetterlé, who first suggested during the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine* that the initial step in dealing with the returned populations would be to classify each and every individual according to their 'blood origins', rather than by their place of birth. The exact mechanism of this operation does not appear to have been set out by the *Conférence*, and neither was it indicated that the expulsion of Germans would be the principal aim of classification. The naturalisation of Germans living in the region was of more concern than expulsions at that stage, and was a recurring theme in the discussions of other war-time groups, for example, the *Groupe lorrain*. In fact, the *Section d'études de législation* also discussed the issue in November 1918, with particular reference to the problem of what to do with German immigrants if they could not be expelled *en masse*.<sup>10</sup> It was recognized that expulsions on that scale were unfeasible, not least because of the effect on the labour supply. However, Wetterlé's proposal was accepted by the *Conférence*, and, in April 1915, it

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<sup>9</sup> Modifications to signs relating to the change in the frontier, as well as alterations in the names of towns and villages, were sometimes achieved by simply painting over the German signs. However, the paint did not always adhere properly, to the embarrassment of the French authorities. ADM, 304 M 296.

<sup>10</sup> *Procès verbaux* of 20 and 21 sessions in AJ 30/95.

was agreed that upon victory, French troops arriving in Alsace-Lorraine, with the assistance of mayors' offices around the regions, would distribute identity cards to every man, woman, and child. It was recognized that in the event of a plebiscite within the regions, it would be essential to limit the electorate to those originating from Alsace and the Moselle. Classification of the population would, therefore, allow the French government a chance to separate out those whose sentiment was anti-French or unreliable. By November 1918, events had already begun to force the pace, and, after having visited the regions, *Conférence* delegates, reported that *indigènes* were already demanding the expulsion of German civil servants. The classification of the population, in the light of this, was to play a crucial role in the expulsion process.

By the end of the war, classification of indigenous *Mosellans* and Alsatians was already a well established practice, in the sense that Alsace-Lorrainer refugees who had made their way to France during the war, had been classified by special commissions which accorded the 'tricolour card' to those of sound pro-French sentiments. Equally, in 1914, inhabitants of 'Alsace reconquise', which was an army operational zone, had also been subjected to a system of military controls involving the use of cards. For the military at least, with its tendency towards order and organisation, such a system was comforting and reassuring.

Four different categories of card were created, and these were set out in an *arrêté* issued by the *Général Gouverneur de Metz*, General de Maud'huy.<sup>11</sup> The first, card A, was given to those who had held French citizenship, or whose parents had held French citizenship prior to 1870, and who had lost this by virtue of the Treaty of

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<sup>11</sup> 'Instruction sur l'application de l'arrêté du 14 décembre de Général Gouverneur de Metz', ADM, 304 M 325. See also an illustration of the appearance of each card in Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.528.



Frankfurt.<sup>1</sup> This class of person was automatically reintegrated into the French Republic, ‘de plein droit’. In appearance, card A had two parallel stripes running diagonally across the white card, one blue and the other red, signifying the colours of the French flag, as can be seen in figure 4 below.

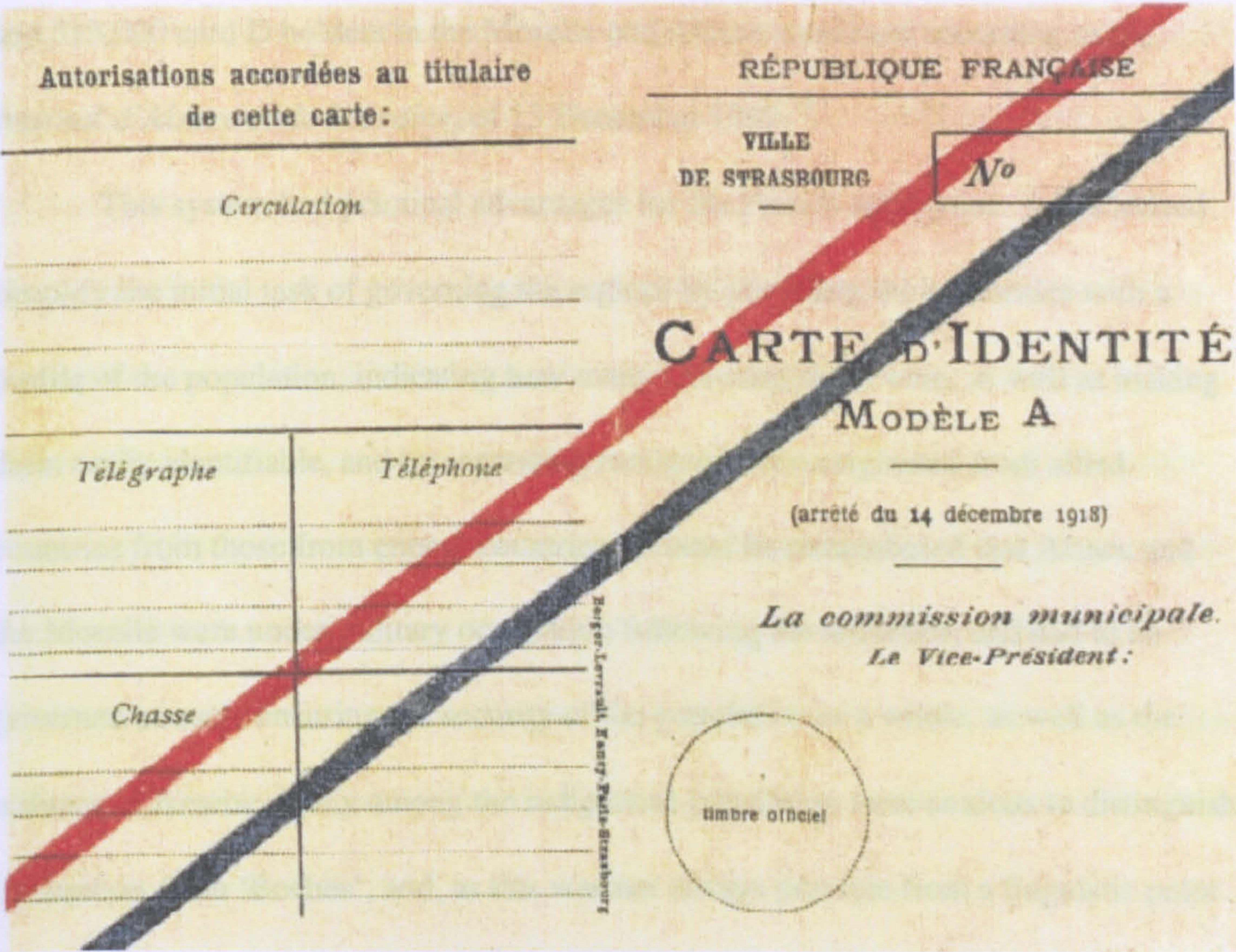


Figure 4: Identity card A awarded to *indigènes* in the Moselle and Alsace.<sup>2</sup>

Card B was issued to those born in Alsace-Lorraine, but who had only one parent of French origin (and therefore entitled to join category A). This card had two red stripes, which formed a cross. Foreign subjects of non-enemy states were issued

<sup>1</sup> See Figure 4.  
<sup>2</sup> From Philippot, Georges, *Gendarmerie et identité nationale en Alsace et Lorraine de 1918 à 1926*, memoire de DEA, Metz, 1997.



with card C, which had two blue diagonal stripes which crossed in the middle. And card D, which was entirely white, was issued to those for whom both parents originated from enemy countries (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria) as well as their children, even if those children had been born in Alsace-Lorraine. There were 1,082,000 card A holders, 183,000 card B holders, 53,000 card C holders, and 513,000 card D holders in the Moselle and Alsace combined according to the *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, of 15 December 1919.<sup>14</sup>

This system had practical advantages for the French authorities. It did indeed simplify the initial task of governing the regions by providing the authorities with a profile of the population, indicating how many Germans there were, as well as making them easily identifiable, and by separating foreigners who originated from allied countries from those from enemy countries. It must be remembered that Alsace and the Moselle were under military occupation following the armistice, and had to be governed as such, ensuring the security of the population as a whole, as well as the military. Likewise, many among the indigenous population were anxious to distinguish themselves from 'Boches', and, as this was not always possible from a linguistic point of view, the *carte d'identité* marked with the French national colours was often carried with pride. The cards also doubled as travel documents. On the back of each card it stated, 'Autorisations accordées au titulaire de cette carte'. There was space for permission to travel, and even to go hunting. Anyone wishing to travel within the regions had to carry their card, after having obtained the appropriate permission (in the form of a *laissez-passer*). A network of control posts around the regions were

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<sup>14</sup> Kirk, Grayson, *French Administrative Policy in Alsace-Lorraine, 1918-1929*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1930, p.137. Kirk actually gives the date as 15 December 1918, rather than 1919. It is most probably a typographical error, as mayors around the regions were given until 24 December 1918 to draw up the necessary lists of residents in their *communes*. It is inconceivable that these figures were prepared and collated a full week ahead of this date.



operated by the military, at which all individuals were obliged to produce a *carte d'identité* and the correct permission to travel. These restrictions meant the new regime was able to hold a tight grip on the population. Those unable to prove their origins, were automatically allocated card A.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the obvious advantages for a government dealing with a seemingly unstable, multi-racial population, the system created a catalogue of difficulties and problems which produced anger, disillusionment, and frustration among those sections of society which did not fall neatly into category A.

In fact, General de Maud'huy himself unwittingly set out in his *instruction* the first problem encountered by families. The document gives several examples of how classification would work in practice, the first of which showed how husbands and wives could find themselves in different categories. Madame Y, born of French origin (with two French parents), married to Monsieur Z who was German, would receive card A and her husband, card D. When it came to children, however, the system began to show signs of discrimination based on gender. Children would receive,

la carte B

si un des deux ascendants seul est français

si l'un et l'autre ont la carte B

si le père a la carte B et la mère la carte C

la carte C

si le père a la carte C et la mère une carte autre

que la carte A.

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<sup>15</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.529. This was for orphans, or displaced persons, who were unlikely to pose any kind of political threat.

A heavy emphasis was laid upon the origins of the father, rather than the mother, when deciding which category of card a child should receive.<sup>16</sup> This was because French men were full citizens in 1918 whereas women were not, as illustrated by in the fact that they did not have the vote. This system is rather at odds with the reality that many indigenous men in the Moselle and Alsace fought in the German army, and were treated with great suspicion by the French authorities upon their return to the regions. However, the most distressing aspect of the system was that it was clearly possible in some cases for a family to have three different categories of card.<sup>17</sup>

Pierri Zind is particularly scathing about the system of classification. 'Cette ségrégation raciste était foncièrement ignoble'.<sup>18</sup> He argues that the system superimposed the artificial unity of France upon the regions, ignoring the ethnic roots of their populations which reached into the surrounding regions: from the Saarland, the Palatinate and Luxembourg for Lorrainers; to Switzerland, the Rhineland and Baden for Alsatians. According to Zind, the Parisians appeared more foreign to the populations of the Moselle and Alsace than the Germanic races to the north and east. Zind's examination of the ethnic origins of the provinces theoretically provides a sound case against the system of classification. Most *Mosellans* and *Alsaciens de vieille souche* would not have had to look very far back in their family trees to find their roots which penetrated deep into the surrounding continent. However, in 1918, how many within the indigenous population cared to consider this point of view? How many were there whose ethnic origins were actually reflected in a sense of mixed identity, or sentiment, or of divided loyalties? Especially among the *Mosellans*, many were

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<sup>16</sup> The prejudice written into the classification of children appeared when the father had a card B and the mother a card C, the child would follow the father's classification and also receive a card B. However, if the father had a card C and the mother a card B, then the child would still follow the father's classification and receive a card C.

<sup>17</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.529.



overjoyed to receive their red, white, and blue identity cards. For the vast majority of the indigenous population, especially in rural areas where there had been very little German immigration, classification was clear-cut and there was no difficulty in joining category A.

Yet, not everyone appreciated having to prove that their origins were purely French. Marguerite Puhl-Demange believes many actually found this process deeply offensive.<sup>19</sup> In the urban context, mixed marriages were considerably more common. A report from the *contrôle postal de Metz* quoted one exasperated correspondent, who claimed, 'Il faut actuellement apporter un arbre généalogique pour obtenir seulement une carte d'identité'.<sup>20</sup> It was, in fact, those who did not fall neatly into category A, but who joined the somewhat grey area of categories B and C, who regarded the system as unjust and fundamentally flawed. It was these people who would have been most likely to agree with Zind's racial criticism of classification. How many of their neighbours, friends, and even relations, easily qualified for category A cards but had great grandparents who came from the Saarland, Bavaria, or even Prussia? What lay at the source of these people's sense of injustice was that whilst de Maud'huy's *instruction* states that the *carte d'identité* 'ne confère pas un titre de nationalité', categories were still decided according to the *national* origins of each individual, not by the individual's national sentiment. And yet, the question of sentiment was clearly in the minds of the system's architects when guidelines were drawn up for calculating a child's category in the case of a mixed marriage. The result was that, ultimately, a rogue parent of foreign origin could deny a staunch French patriot, perhaps even a

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<sup>18</sup> Zind, P., *Elsaß Lothringen, Alsace-Lorraine*, p.111.

<sup>19</sup> Suffert, G., Pelt, J-M., *Marguerite Puhl-Demange. La Lorraine au quotidien*, Metz, 1986, p.32. Puhl-Demange was the daughter of Victor Demange, who founded the *Metzer Freies Journal* in 1919.

<sup>20</sup> Château de Vincennes, 16 N 1464. Report of 25 January 1919.

member of the *Souvenir Français* or one time *protestataire*,<sup>21</sup> full integration into their beloved France, whilst, across the street, a neighbour who, during German annexation, had denounced *indigènes* to the German administration, was *réintégré de plein droit* with no questions asked.<sup>22</sup>

A weekly report from the *administrateur* in Sarreguemines, dated 11 March 1919, noted that the indigenous population in his *arrondissement* was unhappy with the conditions for obtaining card A, laid out in the *arrêté* of 14 December 1918.

Beaucoup disent que cet arrêté accorde trop de faveurs à  
des personnes qui à leur avis ne sont plus dignes d'être  
considérées comme Alsaciens-Lorrains telles les femmes  
qui ont marié des allemands (sic.).<sup>23</sup>

The *indigènes* would prefer, the report goes on, that category A cards only be issued to 'Alsaciens-Lorrains proprement dits'.

There is little likelihood that any system of classification could have taken into account any means of measuring sentiment under the circumstances presented in 1918, and during the months and years which followed. Indeed, the French authorities set up various separate bodies which sought to establish the national sentiment of individuals. Nonetheless, the cards, intentionally or otherwise, crudely denoted sentiment, racially segregated the population, and interfered with the everyday lives of those who carried them. As Marguerite Puhl-Demange states, for those whose children received a *carte C*, this amounted to a type of 'marque d'infamie', the worst form of stigma.<sup>24</sup> This was because, again contrary to de Maud'huy's statement that the identity cards only

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<sup>21</sup> This was someone who had supported the *Protestataire* political movement following annexation, which protested against the Treaty of Frankfurt during the 1870s and 1880s.

<sup>22</sup> Kirk, *French Administrative Policy*, p.137-139.

<sup>23</sup> ADM, 301 M 53.

<sup>24</sup> ADM, 301 M 53.



constituted 'un classement en ce qui concerne la circulation dont elle facilite le contrôle', the cards had a further impact upon their holders. Holders of card A and D received radically different rates for their German marks when they attempted to exchange them for francs. Card A holders received 1.25 francs for their marks, whereas card D holders received only 0.74 francs.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the *administrateur* in Metz-Campagne, in his weekly report of 7 March 1919, described how a young man, in receipt of a *carte B* due to having a French father and a foreign mother (though not necessarily German), was having some difficulty finding work in the railways. They, and other administrations would only employ card A holders.

Il y a des personnes tout à fait recommandables, très françaises, qui voient le gagne-pain ainsi enlevé à leurs enfants, qui cependant si on prend alors la loi de la nationalité sont français du père. Un grand malaise règne de cet état de chose...

The *administrateur* added that it was necessary to remind administrations that 'la carte d'identité ne crée pas un titre de nationalité, que c'est une simple question de circulation et que par conséquent les titulaires de la carte (B) ne sont pas à exclure par principe des emplois administratifs.'<sup>26</sup>

Mayors' offices around the region regularly received inquiries from individuals seeking to obtain *cartes A* in place of *cartes B*, as many feared that only those in category A would be allowed to remain in the regions.<sup>27</sup> All offices were instructed to

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<sup>25</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.518.

<sup>26</sup> Kirk, p.137. Kirk cites another case in which an Alsatian civil servant 'who had been retarded in his professional advancement because of his Francophile sentiments, and who, forty years before, had married an Austrian woman, now saw his children given a class B card and thereby impeded in their search for work'.

<sup>27</sup> ADM, 301 M 53. Weekly report from the *administrateur* in Sarreguemines, of 21 April 1919, and sent to the *commissaire de la République*.

turn away such inquiries. Inevitably, it was not long before counterfeit identity cards were being sold on the black market to Germans. One such case was reported in Algrange, near Thionville, where the secretary of the mayor was accused of giving *cartes d'identités A* to a German and his father for 20 francs. The *administrateur* of Thionville-Ouest, in his letter of 11 March 1919 to the *commissaire de la République* in Metz, called for 'une sanction sévère' against those responsible, and stated that, 'toute faute de ce genre donne toute latitude à ces allemands [sic.] de dénigrer les procédés de l'administration française'.<sup>28</sup> A similar affair was reported in the newspaper, the *Lorrain*.

On a saisi, à différentes reprises, des cartes d'identité A sur des Allemands authentiques. L'origine de ces cartes est maintenant établie: il existe, à Offenbourg, une officine qui, sous la direction d'un Allemand nommé K[...], fabrique des cartes d'identité.<sup>29</sup>

Cards were then sold in the Moselle for between 50 and 200 francs.

Clearly, the system was not altogether foolproof. But the emergence of a black market for identity cards was entirely predictable, in view of the benefits of card A and the punitive nature of card D, since possession of a *carte D* did not only mean financial disadvantages and employment difficulties. From the very earliest stages of the system's implementation, it became obvious that the main reason for classifying the population was to quickly and efficiently sift out those elements within the population who were deemed 'Boche', 'suspect', or 'undesirable'. Ultimately, those in possession of a *carte D* were not expected by the French authorities to remain within the returned

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<sup>28</sup> ADM, 802 P (provisional code). This was known as the *Affaire Kieffer*.

<sup>29</sup> 6 T 3, Le Lorrain, 1 August 1919.



provinces.<sup>30</sup> Classification of the population was the first step in the *épuration* process. The aim was to identify the enemy, stand them apart, then drive them out, either by persuasion or by force.

*Expulsion or voluntary repatriation?*

C'est comme un enchantement, nous écrit-on de la vallée de la Fentsch. L'épuration se fait avec une suite extraordinaire. En moyenne 150 personnes quittent notre arrondissement par semaine pour retourner en Bochie. Il n'y a pas un qui échappe à la justice des choses.<sup>31</sup>

Within the returned provinces, Germans, or card D holders, fell into three categories: those allowed to remain for a fixed term; those authorized to leave voluntarily; and those obliged to leave, and issued accordingly with expulsion papers. Much has been made of the role of the *commissions de triage* in determining who was to leave following *désannexion*.<sup>32</sup> However, they played only one part in the process of expelling large numbers of Germans, as well as *Mosellans* and Alsatians, from the regions. In fact, expulsions ordered by the *commissions de triage* account for only a fraction of the overall departures. More importantly, Mirman did not regard the *commissions de triage* as the sole means of expelling individuals from the region.<sup>33</sup>

The first expulsions date from 23 December 1918, long before the Treaty of Versailles and the legal transfer of the territory to French sovereignty permitted such

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<sup>30</sup> Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.11.

<sup>31</sup> Article entitled 'l'Épuration' in *Le Thionvillois*, 9 April, 1919.

<sup>32</sup> These commissions are discussed below, p.182.

<sup>33</sup> ADM, 26 Z 26. Letter to the *administrateur de Sarreguemines* of 25 February 1919, part II.

actions. The last took place in July 1921. All expulsions were justified by the French authorities by reference to article 7 of the law of November and December 1849, and it was upon this law that the *commissaire de la République en Lorraine* based the following announcement;

Le Ministre de l'Intérieur pourra, par mesure de police  
enjoindre à tout étranger voyageant ou résidant en  
France de sortir immédiatement du territoire français et  
le faire reconduire à la frontière.

The same rights also applied to prefects in frontier regions with regard to non-resident foreigners, who could be referred to the Minister for the Interior for expulsion.<sup>34</sup> The above announcement also stated that those who attempted to return to the provinces following expulsion, could be imprisoned for up to six months (although it appears sentences were often no more than six days).<sup>35</sup> The *Circulaire ministérielle* of 23 January 1919, set out the conditions under which a person's presence in the provinces could no longer be tolerated. These conditions were as vague as possible. All persons who were deemed to have compromised 'l'ordre et la tranquillité publics' could be expelled. Anything from drunkenness, rowdiness or immoral behaviour, to singing loudly in German, could result in the issuing of expulsion orders. In other words, this *circulaire* provided a 'licence to expel'. However, as far as the question of *épuration* was concerned, this method was rather haphazard, and could only affect those who actually stepped out of line. Thus, the French authorities set about establishing which

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<sup>34</sup> ADM, 304 M 212. This document is undated. However, it was written between January and March 1919 as it refers to a ministerial note of 23 January, whilst in March, affairs regarding the regions were no longer handled directly by the Ministry for the Interior, but by the *commissariat général* in Strasbourg. The 1849 law, though, was cited from the earliest stages of the French occupation of the provinces, in order to justify the expulsion of Germans and *indésirables*.

<sup>35</sup> Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in *Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV*, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23.



groups in society should formally be invited to leave. Initially, it was written into the terms of the November armistice that all military personnel were obliged to leave the regions within two weeks. It was also anticipated by the French authorities that all German civil servants would leave as soon as their positions had been filled by *indigènes*, or by the incoming French. This involved all levels, including high-ranking administrators, teachers, clerical staff, postal staff, as well as railway workers. Civil servants were regarded as the ‘agents’ of the state, and in the case of the Moselle, the vast majority of middle to high-ranking civil service posts had been held during annexation by Germans, many of whom had filled the posts vacated in the 1870s by the outgoing *Mosellans optants*.

As well as civil servants, other specific categories of person were expected to leave. In his letter to the *administrateur* in Sarreguemines of 25 February 1919, Mirman announced Jeanneney’s desire to see the expulsion and repatriation of ‘boches’ accelerated in Lorraine.<sup>36</sup> Exactly why Jeanneney desired this is unclear. Local discontent at the sluggishness of *épuration* may have been one reason. Equally, the French feared that, rather than there being a shortage of labour, an unemployment crisis was looming as the war economy and the need for munitions evaporated. The popularity of the French regime relied heavily upon its ability to ensure employment for the indigenous population. Whatever the reason, Mirman expressed the need to expel, not only those who had committed ‘des actes spécialement répréhensibles’, but also those who were ‘susceptibles d’exercer une influence allemande du fait de leur situation sociale; les intellectuels, les rentiers, les propriétaires fonciers, les commerçants etc.’. The higher up the social ladder these people were, the more desirable was their departure. The *administrateur* for Metz-Campagne also supported

the need quickly to expel factory owners and directors who were, he claimed, 'en général très allemands, anti-français'.<sup>37</sup> For those Mirman refers to as 'boches complets', there was, he added, no real need to consult the *commissions de triage*, except where there was some doubt about their origins. However, Mirman reckoned, that there was less urgency about the 'little people' - workers, employees, and artisans - so long as their attitude was irreproachable. This letter, with its aggressive tone, constant use of the term 'boche', and its desire for indiscriminate expulsions, paints a particularly disturbing picture of Mirman and the administration he led in the Moselle. It is also damning evidence of how Mirman, backed up by Jeanneney, milked the 1849 law in order to cleanse the region of as many Germans and *indésirables* as possible. The two men appear to have surpassed the mandate of the law, employing, instead, what they regarded as 'preventive measures' with regard to those they reckoned were most likely to pose a nationalist, political threat.

In May 1919, further groups were identified by the new regime for expulsion, and this time they included the unemployed and the poor. Again, these were groups which, it was claimed, posed both a political and social threat to the stability of the region. As Brasme states, this was yet another preventive measure which accepted the public's belief that Bolshevism and poverty went hand in hand. However, these two groups also placed the greatest financial burden on the regions, a burden their expulsion would helpfully remove. In August of that year, Millerand asked his *commissaire* in Metz to 'provoquer le départ des Allemands nécessaires, actuellement à la charge des budgets locaux'.<sup>38</sup> The following month, it was decided that all

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<sup>36</sup> ADM, 26 Z 26. Section VI of letter.

<sup>37</sup> ADM, 301 M 53. Weekly report from the *administrateur* in Metz-Campagne, of 7 March 1919.

<sup>38</sup> Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.13.



unemployed Germans who had not yet requested their repatriation should be expelled. Unfortunately, no figures exist for exactly how many were 'disposed of' in this way.

The indignity and misery of expulsion from the Moselle region could, supposedly, be lessened by opting for voluntary repatriation. This meant that, instead of awaiting expulsion orders by following the correct procedure, permission would be granted to allow individuals and their families to leave the region and travel to Germany. In fact, even before the armistice had been signed, many families had chosen not to remain. At that stage, they had attempted to sell as much of their property as possible, and had taken with them whatever money and belongings they could transport. Once the French authorities arrived, such were the restrictions on movement within the provinces, that the only way to depart legally was to opt for voluntary repatriation.

The *Messin* newspaper carried an announcement by de Maud'huy giving permission to depart to 'les citoyens allemands qui lui en feront la demande et qui ne sont pas sous le coup de poursuites judiciaires'.<sup>39</sup> Regular notices appeared in the Moselle's press informing Germans wishing to leave of the repatriation procedure. After submitting a *demande de rapatriement*, the individual was obliged to produce identification papers, a certificate of nationality, a receipt stating that payments of all taxes were up to date, and a favourable report from the relevant mayor.<sup>40</sup> All of the above documents were then examined by the *Bureau Spécial des Rapatriés pour l'Allemagne* (second floor of the *Corps du Garde*, Place d'Armes, Metz). This office was run by the military. Once permission had been granted, a form was issued in both French and German stating where and when the applicant should present himself or

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<sup>39</sup> *Le Messin*, 2 January 1919. Article entitled 'Rapatriement des Allemands'.

herself.<sup>41</sup> In the case of Madame S..., aged 47 and living in Terville (adjacent to Thionville), she and her six children were to present themselves on 22 April 1919 at 8am at the station buffet in the station at Thionville, where every *rapatrié* was to be examined and their baggage searched. The form went on to state,

Chaque voyageur pourra emporter:

1. Un maximum de 30kg. de bagages.
2. Deux jours de vivres.
3. Un maximum de 2000 marks par personne majeure et de 500 marks par enfant, *en Billets de banque allemands*.

*Toute somme supérieure sera confisquée.*<sup>42</sup>

Each *rapatrié* was also obliged to buy a rail ticket for the journey which was obtained the night before travelling. Gold, coins of any kind, and French or allied money were forbidden. All property and belongings left behind by both the *expulsés* and the *rapatriés* were liable for sequestration, and then liquidation by the French authorities.<sup>43</sup> This, coupled with the rapidly decreasing value of the mark, left families with barely enough money to feed themselves, let alone find accommodation once they reached Germany. Yet, not everyone was granted permission to go to Germany. Brasme cites the example of Judge Ernst Kirnstein who, in March 1919, due to the somewhat precarious state of his financial affairs, was refused permission to be

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<sup>40</sup> Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59 Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> See figure 5 which shows an example of a voluntary repatriation form. ADM, 27 Z 6. In many cases, only the French section was filled in as it was the French military who completed the forms and very few of them understood German. Equally, the form was to be presented at the point of departure to the military authority who, again, were only interested in the details written in French.

<sup>42</sup> ADM, 27 Z 6.

<sup>43</sup> Exceptions were eventually made for civil servants who were granted permission to retrieve their furniture from the provinces.



repatriated. He was prevented from departing because he would have left behind debts, despite the fact that he had once been a reserve officer in the German army, and was of Prussian origin.<sup>44</sup> Although the French regime *invited* the German population to apply for voluntary repatriation, there were limitations. Furthermore, the forms issued for those choosing to depart contained exactly the same terms and restrictions as the expulsion orders, as can be seen in figures 5 and 6 on the following pages.<sup>45</sup>

Calculations made from documents in the *Archives départementales de la Moselle*, suggest that between 1918 and 1921, 4,389 expulsions were made by the French authorities from the whole of the Moselle department.<sup>46</sup> This figure represents the number of names to be found in a hand-written book, which appears to provide the most complete list for the period. The figure may be slightly distorted as in some cases only the head of the family was listed, even though other family members were included in the deportation order. Equally, a further hand-written list contains the names of 5,740 individuals considered to be *indésirables*. However, as a covering letter with this list suggests, many of those identified as *indésirable* would have already opted for voluntary repatriation ahead of police enquiries and investigations, and so expulsion measures would not have been necessary. A type-written list entitled 'Indésirables et expulsés de Metz' gives more information about the 2,678 individuals

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<sup>44</sup> Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.5. Germans of Prussian origin were the most despised of all by the French, due to wartime propaganda and memories of the Franco-Prussian War.

<sup>45</sup> See Figure 5.

<sup>46</sup> ADM, 304 M 220. This file is to be found in the *Répertoire numérique* under the section 'Relations franco-allemandes'. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell exactly how many among these *expulsés* were *indigènes*, and how many were Germans.



Commissariat de la République  
Service Spécial des Rapatriements  
pour l'Allemagne

Freiwillige Rückkehr

Commissariat de la République  
Service spécial des rapatriements  
pour l'Allemagne

**RAPATRIÉ VOLONTAIRE.**

Madame Schmitt Barbe, née Pois, âgée de 47 ans  
et ses 6 enfants mineurs sans profession  
Profession  
Domiciliée à Ferville

est avisé que sa demande de rapatriement est acceptée.

En conséquence, le Commissaire de la République lui donne l'ordre de se trouver le  
22 Avril, à 8 heures du matin, à la Cantine de la gare de  
Thionville, pour l'examen individuel, la visite des bagages et la formation du convoi.

Une fois le convoi rassemblé, il est formellement interdit de le quitter sous quelque  
prétexte que ce soit.

Chaque voyageur pourra emporter :

- 1° Un maximum de 30 Kg. de bagages.
- 2° Deux jours de vivres.
- 3° Un maximum de 2000 marks par personne majeure et de 500 marks par enfant,  
en Billets de banque allemands.

Toute somme supérieure sera confisquée.

Il est interdit d'emporter, soit de l'or, soit de l'argent monnayé, soit des billets de  
banque français ou alliés, soit des valeurs, soit des lettres. La même interdiction s'applique  
à toutes provisions alimentaires supérieures à deux jours de vivres par personne.

Les personnes qui, pour une raison quelconque reconnue non valable, manqueraient le  
départ au jour fixé, se verront refuser ultérieurement toute autorisation de départ libre et  
pourront être expulsées.

Chaque voyageur devra être muni de son billet de chemin de fer qu'il aura  
pris la veille.

Thionville, le 19 Avril, 1919.

p<sup>r</sup> le Commissaire de la République  
L'Administrateur,  
[Signature]

Cette convocation sera présentée à l'autorité militaire à l'arrivée à la gare de THIONVILLE  
(cantine des permissionnaires).




Figure 5: Voluntary repatriation form, issued 19 April 1919.



COMMISSARIAT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE  
Service spécial  
des  
Rapatriements pour l'Allemagne

# Ausweisungsbefehl.

COMMISSARIAT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE  
Service spécial  
des  
Rapatriements pour l'Allemagne

# Ordre de Départ.

M<sup>lle</sup>

*Freutz Rosine*

âgé de

Profession

Domiciliée à

*Rudeling, avenue de Liexch*

est avisé que son départ pour l'Allemagne (Zone non occupée par les Alliés) aura lieu le *22 Avril 1919*

En conséquence, le Commissaire de la République lui donne l'ordre de se trouver à *8* heures du *matin* à la Cantine de la gare de Thionville, pour l'examen individuel, la visite des bagages et la formation du convoi.

Tout retard ou défaut de présentation à l'heure indiquée serait suivie d'arrestation

Une fois le convoi rassemblé, il est formellement interdit de le quitter sous quelque prétexte que ce soit.

Chaque voyageur pourra emporter :

- 1° Un maximum de 30 Kg. de bagages.
- 2° Deux jours de vivres.
- 3° Un maximum de 2000 marks par personne majeure et de 500 marks par enfant, en Billets de banque allemands.

Toute somme supérieure sera confisquée.

Il est interdit d'emporter, soit de l'or, soit de l'argent monnayé, soit des billets de banque français ou alliés, soit des valeurs, soit des lettres. La même interdiction s'applique à toutes provisions alimentaires supérieures à deux jours de vivres par personne.

Chaque voyageur devra être muni de son billet de chemin de fer qu'il aura pris la veille

*Signature de l'interne*

Thionville, le

*19 Avril*

1919.

p<sup>r</sup> le Commissaire de la République

L'Administrateur,

*[Signature]*



Cette convocation sera présentée à l'autorité militaire à l'arrivée à la gare de THIONVILLE (cantine des permissionnaires).

Figure 6: Expulsion form, issued 19 April 1919.



expelled from the city.<sup>47</sup> For example, the names of 21 ‘Religieuses Boches qui se sont très mal comportées pendant la guerre’ are to be found. As well as nuns, individuals of all professions are listed including lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers, domestic servants, and hairdressers, to name but a few.

**Table 6: Changes in population according to nationality.<sup>48</sup>**

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>Percentage change</i>
<b>German</b>	164,502	44,899	-72.7
<b>Austrian</b>	3,806	616	-83.8
<b>Hungarian</b>	222	104	-53.2

Overall, though, the total number of expulsions indicated by these lists does not account for the dramatic reduction in the size of the German community illustrated by the change in census figures between 1910 and 1921. As detailed in table 6 above, there were 164,502 Germans living in the Moselle in 1910. This figure had dropped to 44,899 by 1921, a drop of 119,603 (72.7 per cent).<sup>49</sup> This reduction can largely be accounted for by the system of expulsion and voluntary repatriation operated by the French as soon as they arrived in the region. The total number of those who opted for voluntary repatriation can only be estimated, as lists are not as complete or as reliable as those for expulsions. Several factors should be taken into account. Allowance must be made for the departure of the German military at the end of the war. In 1910 there had been 22,228 military personnel permanently stationed in the Moselle. The death

<sup>47</sup> ADM, 304 M 213.

<sup>48</sup> *Annuaire Statistique, Office Régional de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, Premier Volume - 1919 à 1931.



toll at the end of the war, which again is hard to estimate due to the massive shifts in population during and immediately after the conflict, must also be considered.

Likewise, an indeterminate number of Germans had already left the region before French troops arrived, and expulsions began. However, it is unlikely that many actually succeeded in reaching Germany, as roads were choked with retreating soldiers and their equipment. In total, therefore, taking into consideration the above movements of population, it is estimated that roughly 90,000 German immigrants between 1918 and 1921 opted for voluntary repatriation to Germany from the Moselle department.

### *An undignified departure*

The trains carrying the *rapatriés* and *expulsés* from the Moselle region passed into Germany either through Alsace and across the bridge at Kehl, or over the border to the north of the region at Forbach and on to Saarbrücken. Most departed from Metz, Thionville, or Sarreguemines. At the stations there was a heavy military presence and *Gendarmes* were also on hand to control any crowds. The *commissaire spécial* Wagner was in charge of the station in Metz and his reports give vivid accounts of the departures. One such document, of 2 April 1919, describes the scene. On platform 6, the train destined to take the 'indésirables expulsés' to Saarbrücken waited. A military and police contingent ensured that only those permitted to depart boarded the train, whilst an officer formed an orderly crowd, grouping men and women separately.<sup>50</sup> An incident occurred where a uniformed customs officer assisted a woman *expulsée* with

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<sup>49</sup> The numbers of Austrians and Hungarians dropped by a similar margin during the same period, as they were also among those considered to be from enemy states.

<sup>50</sup> ADM, 304 M 212. Sent to the *commissaire de la République* in Metz. It is unclear why it was necessary to separate men and women in this way.

her baggage. 'Le Commissaire spécial lui ayant fait remarquer son attitude hideuse en cette circonstance et son manque de dignité sous l'uniforme en présence de 400 Allemands expulsés, l'a renvoyé des quais'. Some American soldiers also gained access to platform 6, and were seen to make their farewells and to shake hands with some of the *expulsés*, notably women. They were also dismissed from the platform by the *commissaire spécial*. As the train departed, infantrymen took up their positions standing on the footplates of the carriages. A crowd of onlookers had also gathered at the station. Some may have turned up out of curiosity, wishing to witness the remarkable sight. Others may have come to bid farewell to family members or friends.

Une foule qu'on peut estimer à un millier de personnes se tenait sur les deux routes bordant la voie, derrière les grillages et palissades, et saluait les partants en agitant leurs mouchoirs. Il n'y a pas eu de cris, ni de chants, ni aucune manifestation bruyante.

After the train had departed, the crowd dispersed.

Another report, also written by Wagner, of 7 May 1919, illustrates the routine nature of the exercise, 'Le beau temps avait attiré plus de monde que de coutume pour assister au passage du train'.<sup>51</sup> He also notes that the *expulsés* were finding ways of taking more than the permitted 30 kilogrammes of luggage. They did this by arriving at the station the night before they were due to depart, and checking in their luggage. That luggage was placed in the three luggage vans attached to the train. The following morning, however, the *expulsés* arrived, each carrying a further 30 kilogrammes of luggage. Conditions during the journey were reportedly poor, and a complaint was

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



sent to the *commissaire de la République* in Metz by the *conseiller d'Etat* Kneip.<sup>52</sup>

Some trains carried up to 1,400 *expulsés* and *rapatriés*, a fifth of whom were children, and, in some cases, took 36 hours to arrive at Kehl. Children were reported to have suffered from diarrhoea and other illnesses related to the lack of properly heated food.

Some *expulsés* and *rapatriés*, especially those departing from Sarreguemines, travelled into Germany via the bridge at Kehl, a town situated on the east bank of the Rhine river across from Strasbourg. The *administrateur* of the *arrondissement* of Sarreguemines, received a letter from the German Foreign Minister recounting how a major in the German army had been horrified to discover that his wife had been frisked at the checkpoint in Kehl, before her expulsion to the Rhineland. The *administrateur* pointed out that soldiers and *Gendarmes* were merely following orders by carrying out the task, but that perhaps women could be recruited in their place. A daily pay of five francs was suggested. Frisking was necessary, as well as luggage searches, in order to prevent individuals from carrying extra currency, gold, or silver, but may have been used to further intimidate *expulsés* and *rapatriés*.

In fact, humiliation appears to have been the order of the day, and newspapers such as the *Thionvillois* joined in the chorus. On 9 April 1919 the newspaper reported, with undisguised glee, the expulsion of the director general of the *Usines de la paix* at Knutange, who was arrested and taken to Metz, 'chained to a vagrant'. The newspaper lists the names of other *expulsés* and adds, 'Ils passent, comme les âmes en peine, pour la dernière fois sur le parvis qui vit leur grandeur et leur chute. Ils se consolent cependant, car ils ne sont jamais seules.'

A more distressing aspect of the departures via Kehl was the presence of jeering crowds. A letter sent to Beaune describes the scenes at the Pont de Kehl.

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<sup>52</sup> Reitel, *Montigny -lès-Metz*, p.341.

Depuis longtemps, nous ne nous étonnons plus des humiliations, infamies, etc. ... Des scènes déchirantes se sont passées là (surtout quand la populace, qui semble payée pour cela, bombarde avec des pierres.) ... E. a aussi déjà été attaqué et gravement maltraité; il s'en est tiré vivant comme par un miracle.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the humiliation and hopelessness of the situation at times had extreme consequences both for those actually expelled, as well as those awaiting expulsion. A letter, from the *commissaire spécial* in Metz to the *Directeur des Services Généraux de Police* in Strasbourg, describes how a German police superintendent, imprisoned pending expulsion under General de Maud'huy's orders at the end of January 1919, committed suicide only days after his imprisonment.<sup>54</sup> He left a wife and four children. In the same prison, and in similar circumstances another police superintendent also attempted suicide. Following his recovery, the authorities proceeded with his expulsion, along with that of his wife and three children.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the population threatened with departure from the Moselle region faced the prospect with dread and fear. It was not long, though, before the indigenous population began to sense the shame in the *épuration* process, fearing, above all else, the consequences of the humiliation inflicted upon the *expulsés* and *rapatriés*, not all of whom were necessarily German. One letter sent to the *commissaire général* in Metz, called for an end to such treatment, predicting with alarming accuracy that 'Il se passera quelque chose de terrible qui aura la guerre pour

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<sup>53</sup> Château de Vincennes, 16 N 1464. Report from the *Contrôle postal* in Metz, extract 28.

<sup>54</sup> ADM, 304 M 2. Letter of 22 April 1921.



résultat, car cette honte que vous infligez à ces gens se transformera en une colère secrète et implacable comme la foudre et se vengera d'une façon indescriptible.'<sup>55</sup>

### *The sifting process*

Of all the aspects of the *épuration* process to come under heavy criticism, both internally and externally, the *commissions de triage* appear to have been the most disturbing and disliked. They have been variously described as 'ludicrous and tragic'<sup>56</sup>, as 'une sorte de Haute Cour de justice en patriotisme'<sup>57</sup>, and as 'dépourvu de toutes les garanties des procédures et jugements ordinaires'.<sup>58</sup> According to Georg Wolf, they represented a 'Schandfleck der Übergangszeit', a shameful stain on the history of France.<sup>59</sup> So, what were these *commissions* or tribunals, why were they set up, and what were they meant to achieve?

Again, this was one of the *abbé Wetterlé's* inventions, suggested during the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine*, and implemented by Clemenceau even before the armistice had been signed. Wetterlé insisted upon the expulsion of all Germans who had emigrated to the regions during annexation, as well as their descendants. Initially, the idea of the tribunals was to enable the authorities to 'weed out' politically unreliable Germans who would pose a threat to the stability of the region. However, the *tri* was soon extended beyond Wetterlé's original definition, forcing the *Mosellan* and Alsatian populations to prove their reliability to the incoming French authorities. Germans or Austro-Hungarians were only to go before the commissions in exceptional

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<sup>55</sup> ADM, 304 M 212. Anonymous letter.

<sup>56</sup> Kirk, *French Administrative Policy*, p.46.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Redslob, quoted in Zind, *Elsaß-Lothringen, Alsace-Lorraine*, p.117. Zind describes Redslob as 'un patriote anti-autonomiste'.

<sup>58</sup> Lucien Minck, in the radical newspaper, the *Dépêche de Strasbourg*, 12 January 1930, cited in Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.16.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.531.

cases. Later, in his book *Têtes de boches*, published in 1917, Wetterlé indicated that those Alsace-Lorrainers who had ‘léché les pieds des maîtres prussiens’, should join the defeated Germans on the other side of the Rhine.<sup>60</sup> That such unreliable *indigènes* existed at all, is completely at odds with the French argument that Germanisation had failed to impress or influence any of the original French population. Nonetheless, those immediately under suspicion were all *Mosellans* and Alsatians, who had worked as civil servants, or who had held political appointments under German rule. Rossé claims even some *émigrés* who had spent part, if not all, of the war in the French interior, were also forced to prove the reliability of their sentiment.<sup>61</sup>

Each case brought before the tribunaux passed through various preliminary stages. In every district, a *commission du premier degré* was set up, charged with producing initial reports.<sup>62</sup> The system was under the overall control of the French military. Each *commission* was composed of three members: an officer chosen from the counter-espionage bureau of the French army who acted as president, and two civilians. For example, the report of 17 December 1918, sent to General de Maud’huy, states that the Metz tribunal consisted of General Violand as president, Monsieur Pidancet of an inter-ministerial commission, and Monsieur Collin, a retired teacher from Metz. No information is given as to these individuals’ qualifications for taking up their seats on this tribunal. For example, none of them appears to have any obvious legal training.<sup>63</sup> This panel could call upon the services of the Gendarmerie whose role it was to carry out ‘de petites enquêtes’, to respond to accusations against individuals,

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<sup>60</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.530.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> ADM, 304 M 329, account regarding the setting up of the Metz *commission de triage*, written by General Violand, commandant of the Metz tribunal.

<sup>63</sup> ADM, 304 M 329.



to interview them, as well as any witnesses, and to report back to the tribunal.<sup>64</sup> If the case was to be taken any further, the *commission du 1er degré* would hold a hearing and send its recommendation to the *commission du deuxième degré* in Metz. Only this final *commission* was empowered to actually recommend expulsion. Remarkably, little is known either about the composition or the actions of this tribunal. An order of 23 January 1919 handed over ultimate authority from the military authorities to the *commissaire de la République*, so that the final decision regarding an individual's fate lay in his hands alone.

A note for the *commissions de triage*, from the *Etat-Major* of the second bureau, gave the tribunals a choice of three possible verdicts for each case.<sup>65</sup> Firstly, a person could be declared 'non suspecte', and, in this case, no further action was required. The second outcome declared the person 'suspecte mais non immédiatement dangereuse'. He or she was allowed to remain in the region, but at a fixed address. This category later involved varying levels of surveillance of individuals. The third option declared the accused dangerous, and recommended imprisonment pending removal from the regions. Germans categorized as 'dangerous' by the tribunals were liable to be expelled and sent to Germany on the next convoy. *Mosellans* and *Alsatians*, on the other hand, were expelled from the regions, but sent to camps in central France. According to Rossé, however, it was possible that those who were ignorant of their legal rights could be sent to Germany along with those of German origin.<sup>66</sup> Heavily targeted by the tribunals were *indigènes* who had held posts during

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<sup>64</sup> ADM, 304 M 214. This file contains hand-written reports by Gendarmes on information gathered about individuals.

<sup>65</sup> ADM, 304 M 329. Note of 9 December 1918.

<sup>66</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.532.

annexation in the German civil service.<sup>67</sup> As a result of such investigations, even those found 'innocent' were obliged to accept demotion, premature retirement, or transfers from their home towns.

Adjustments to the system of tribunals were made over the months which followed their creation. These attempted, it would seem, to address some of the acute problems which had emerged. In February 1919, for example, new regulations stated that the officers in charge of each tribunal should have an adequate command of both German and the local dialects.<sup>68</sup> On 7 May, it was announced that civil servants would no longer be tried before the tribunals, but at *conseils de discipline*. However, these councils still had the authority to recommend expulsions where necessary. Only a few days later, an *arrêté* was issued by Millerand announcing the creation of *commissions d'examen des étrangers*. They were set up in order to deal with Germans and Austro-Hungarians 'dont le séjour en Alsace-Lorraine pourrait être contraire à l'ordre public'.<sup>69</sup> These new tribunals were presided over by a magistrate, and prepared the way for naturalisation applications from Germans following the signing of the peace treaty. From then on, therefore, the *commissions de triage* (which were still not presided over by magistrates) dealt solely with the indigenous population. On 16 June 1919, Millerand suspended the notorious *commissions de triage*, but it was not until 27 October 1919 that they were, officially abolished. Kirk states rightly in his 1932 thesis, 'Probably the actual number deported was not great, but one is astonished to

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<sup>67</sup> Soldiers who had served in the German army were also heavily scrutinized at special military tribunals, which considerably delayed their return home at the end of the war. See Brasme, 'Le rapatriement des prisonniers et des combattants alsaciens-lorrains', p.142.

<sup>68</sup> It appears there were not even translators present in the early stages of the tribunals.

<sup>69</sup> ADM, 304 M 154, written by Millerand, the *commissaire général de la République*.



find, after ten years, how bitter are the memories of the people concerning these commissions and their work'.<sup>70</sup>

Even by June of that year, these tribunals had caused untold damage, not only to the lives of those sentenced by them, but to the reputation and perceived integrity of the new French regime. Initially, many had welcomed a system which would supposedly sift out undesirable elements, removing those who had publicly or secretly worked against the indigenous population during annexation and during the war. In view of the regions' brush with revolution during the final days before the entry of French troops, it was easy for the somewhat jittery middle classes to convince themselves that all German neighbours posed a Bolshevik threat. It is possible the French administration played on these fears in order to oil the wheels of the *épuration* process. However, as time passed, the injustice of the system gradually seeped into the public consciousness, not so much through revelations in the press, but through personal experience. Increasing numbers of *indigènes*, rather than German immigrants, found themselves before the tribunals, leading some newspapers to attack the system. 'La composition et le fonctionnement des nouvelles Commissions d'examen donnent aux Allemands toutes les garanties désirables d'équité. Il ne faut pas que les indigènes soient moins bien traités.'<sup>71</sup> Some ten years later, Robert Redslob added his voice to the protests against the tribunals, claiming it was incredible that *Mosellans* and Alsatians were forced to defend both their actions during annexation and 'l'attitude qu'ils avaient eue pour le régime constitutionnellement établi et basé sur un traité en règle'.<sup>72</sup> Prior to the outbreak of war in 1914, the indigenous

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<sup>70</sup> Kirk, p.46. Kirk, in the course of his research, did not have access to the lists of *expulsés* contained in the papers of the *commissariat général*.

<sup>71</sup> ADBR 121 AL 162. *Revue de la Presse Alsacienne*, report on the *commissions de triage*.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Redslob, published in *Le Temps* in April 1929 and quoted in Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.16-17.

population had acted in a manner which had appeared, in the circumstances, to be legal and proper. Anticipating, as they had, a continuation of German rule, should *Mosellans* and Alsatians really have turned down opportunities to work in the civil service which governed their own regions? Penalising them, after their return to French sovereignty, for holding posts in the German civil service was tantamount to punishing them for preventing Germans from gaining total control of their regions. Redslob goes on to add, 'je dois avouer en toute humilité que je n'ai rien compris à cette procédure'.

One autonomist propaganda tract set out its grievances against the *commissions de triage* in a brochure entitled *The Protest of Young Alsace*.<sup>73</sup> It claimed the tribunals were made up of Alsatians who were 'unfamiliar with Alsace, or who were persecuted under the German regime and ... therefore greatly prejudiced'. It went on to claim that judges and witnesses were not sworn, and were therefore not accountable. Furthermore, 'the accused does not know his accuser', 'the accused may not be defended by a lawyer', and 'there is no possibility of an appeal'. This autonomist publication was not the only one to hurl such accusations of illegality and injustice. Lucien Minck published in the *Dépêche de Strasbourg* in January 1930 a similar attack, adding, 'Il convient d'ajouter que les tribunaux ont usé et abusé de cette situation illégale, au point de baser parfois leurs jugements sur des dossiers sciemment fausses et sur des documents inexistantes.'<sup>74</sup> Due to the secrecy surrounding the tribunals, it is hard to know the extent to which all of these criticisms were justified, but there appears an equal lack of evidence in their defence. Indeed, Mirman's

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<sup>73</sup> PRO, FO 371/3750. Signed by The Executive Committee of the Free State Elsaß-Lothringen, this rather poor translation was published in Geneva.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.16. The *Dépêche de Strasbourg* was a radical newspaper favoured by autonomists.



comments in general do little to reveal any great sense of 'fair play'. He even stated, 'L'avis des Commissions de triage n'est pas réglementairement nécessaire, ces commissions ont été faites pour protéger les Alsaciens ou Lorrains non les boches.' Yet, by June 1919, Millerand was compelled to suspend their activities, after only one month in office during which only *Mosellans* and Alsations were tried. During the years which followed their abolition, repeated attempts were made to force the French government to revise the tribunals' decisions, and to win compensation for the victims. Such attempts were supported by almost all deputies from Alsace and the Moselle, most notably, Robert Schuman. On 18 February 1931, he proposed a law in favour of compensation for civil servants who had been victims of the tribunals during the months leading up to 7 May 1919. However, government support for Schuman's efforts was not forthcoming, despite the strength of feeling and weight of support.<sup>75</sup>

The tribunals, in concept as well as function, were indeed unreliable and unjust in the returned provinces. The *mosellan* author, Mungenast, highlights their fundamental flaw, stating, 'au lieu de regarder vers l'avenir [elles ne] considéraient que le passé'.<sup>76</sup> The fact that they survived a mere six months after integration is testimony to their singular lack of appropriateness. Exactly who was responsible for the injustice served upon both the immigrant and indigenous populations is difficult to say. Their evolution from Wetterlé's simple model enforcing the departure of Germans, to a form of 'civilian court-martial' is easy to trace. However, the damage caused by these tribunals would have been minimal had it not been for the willing, and often enthusiastic, participation of a society riddled with willing *dénonciateurs*, whose letters of accusation against neighbours, colleagues, and competitors, flooded Mirman's

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<sup>75</sup> Rossé, *Das Elsaß*, p.535 and Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.18.

office in the months following integration. Was the disgrace of the *commissions de triage* not theirs, just as much as the new administration's?

### *A witch-hunt*

Due to his previous connections with the German Catholic Centre Party, and despite being entitled to hold a category A identity card, the *abbé* Louis Pinck fell into the category of *Mosellans* 'à surveiller discrètement' following the French seizure of power in the provinces.<sup>77</sup> An inhabitant of Pinck's home town of Hambach (near Sarreguemines), whom Pinck had taken to court in 1913, decided to denounce the *abbé*, accusing him of preaching from his pulpit that Alsace-Lorrainers who had deserted the German army had failed to keep their oath of allegiance to the Kaiser. Despite the fact that almost all the inhabitants of Hambach, including the mayor himself, considered this to be untrue, Pinck was nonetheless summoned to appear before the *commission de triage* at Sarreguemines in January 1919. During the following four months, Pinck was ordered to report twice weekly to the local military control, and he was forbidden to travel outwith his parish. When, in December 1919, the *sous-préfet* of Sarreguemines finally lifted the travel restrictions, Pinck requested that he be allowed to retain his *carte de circulation* as a memento of his persecution.<sup>78</sup>

Not all denunciations were of such high-profile individuals as Louis Pinck. Neither were they always aimed at those as capable of defending themselves as he. In fact, Mirman's office, as well as mayor's offices around the region, were inundated

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Commaille, Laurent, 'Ernst-Moritz Mungenast et la Lorraine', in *Les Cahiers Lorrain*, Nos. 3-4, October 1992, pp.545-555.

<sup>77</sup> Hiegel, Henri and Charles, 'L'oeuvre du folkloriste lorrain, Louis Pinck (1873-1940)', in *Les Cahiers Lorrains*, 1981 third trimester, pp.199-218.

<sup>78</sup> Pinck was one of a number of high profile *Mosellans* who supported the autonomist movement in the inter-war period. No doubt this, as well as his experience at the *commissions de triage*, are not unconnected.



with letters of denunciation of ordinary citizens. One letter alone, addressed to Mirman and written by an inhabitant of the Ile St. Symphorien quarter of Metz, included the denunciation of at least 27 neighbours. The author insisted, 'il serait grand temps de faire une rafle complète de tous ces monstres qui ne cessent d'injurier la france [sic.] et qui font la propagande pour exciter la révolution'.<sup>79</sup> The author described his various neighbours as 'pire que boches', as well as 'boche de la haute classe'. He included the names of spouses, as well as children, and the accusations appear to be based largely on overheard conversations. There is no way of telling how seriously this letter was taken. Certainly, in the early stages, though, many were taken at face value, as can be seen in the case of Louis Pinck.

The mayor of Sarreguemines, Monsieur Sigwald, was one of the first to invite denunciations from the local population by placing, on 6 December 1918, the following announcement in the *Saargemünder Zeitung*.

Des personnes qui auraient des communications à faire à  
la Commission de triage pour l'évacuation des  
indésirables sont priées de les faire par écrit et signées à  
l'adresse suivante: Monsieur le Président de la  
Commission de triage, Mairie de Sarreguemines.<sup>80</sup>

This was complemented by regular announcements in the press instructing Germans about the procedure for voluntary repatriation: addresses for applications, how to apply, as well as quantities of luggage and money allowed. For example, the newspaper *Le Messin* carried one such announcement on 2 January 1919 under the heading 'Rapatriement des Allemands', which read 'On nous communique que

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<sup>79</sup> ADM, 304 M 212. The date on this letter is illegible.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Rohr, *La Lorraine mosellane*, p.15.

Monsieur le Général Gouverneur de Metz est disposé à autoriser à rentrer en Allemagne les citoyens allemands qui lui en feront la demande et qui ne sont pas sous le coup de poursuites judiciaires’.

The mayor’s invitation, as well as these announcements, appeared in the press at a time when the atmosphere within the Moselle region was already highly charged. A report for the *Contrôle postal de Metz* in March 1919 describes the general feeling among the indigenous populations. ‘La haine des Lorrains vis-à-vis des allemands [sic.] persiste... Les Lorrains comptent que le Gouvernement français saura faire justice de toutes [les] atrocités commises au mépris des lois de guerre’.<sup>81</sup> The pitiful sight of wagon-loads of Germans, leaving the regions to travel to Germany brought a sense of satisfaction to many who felt that justice was being served. As each convoy made its way into ‘Bochie’, so the denunciations multiplied until there was a permanent threat of denunciation, not just for Germans remaining in the province, but also for *Mosellans*. On 2 May 1919, the newspaper *Le Messin* reported, ‘Les dénonciations pleuvent chez le Commissaire de la République et chez le Gouverneur contre les Allemands de la région.’ Gradually, opportunism crept into the equation and business competitors, feuding neighbours, and disgruntled tenants were to be found among the denouncers. One letter of denunciation contains the accusations of a shopkeeper writing from Sarrebourg following her expulsion from Metz.<sup>82</sup> What is surprising about this letter is that the author appears to be of German origin, and yet she denounces German shopkeepers. The author mentions a tobacconist and a wine merchant, and states they had spoken ill of the French in the period before her own

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<sup>81</sup> Château de Vincennes, 16 N 1464. Report of 16 March 1919, section entitled ‘Opérations de contrôle et impressions générales’.

<sup>82</sup> ADM, 304 M 216. Letter of 15 March 1920. Obviously, this *expulsée* had been allowed to return to the region.



expulsion and were therefore 'boche'. Yet, she claims, these were people who, in the presence of French, were 'les plus bochophobes'. Her reason for making the denunciation was, she alleged, so that they too would experience the misery she had endured as a result of her expulsion. The letter accompanying the complaint of 15 March 1920, and sent by the military authorities in Sarrebourg to the *sous-préfet* in Metz, suggests the denunciations may be of some use 'quoique inspiré par la jalousie et la rancune'. Even the normally Germanophobic newspaper, *Le Messin*, recognized the spurious nature of many of the denunciations.

Quelques-unes émanent de concurrents commerciaux,  
d'autres de personnes qui convoitent l'achat d'une  
maison que l'Allemand menacé d'expulsion devra vendre  
à prix réduit. Certaines sont inspirées de basses  
vengeances. Les services compétents devinent aisément  
les vilenies qui inspirent quelques dénonciateurs.<sup>83</sup>

Some mayors felt that by 'advertising' voluntary repatriation, they could stem the flow of false denunciations. Brasme gives the example of Sainte-Marie-aux-Chênes, north west of Metz, whose mayor recognized that many denunciations were 'souvent dictées par la vengeance personnelle'. By encouraging Germans themselves to come forward, thereby pre-empting denouncers, 'l'épuration se fait en toute douceur, et la vie communale n'y perd rien en dignité et en cohésion'.<sup>84</sup> Instead of preventing false denunciations by punishing those who invented them, the authorities

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<sup>83</sup> *Le Messin*, 2 May 1919, quoted in Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.8.

<sup>84</sup> Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.10.

chose simply to speed up the departures, so that there would be fewer Germans to denounce.

The *Archives Départementales de la Moselle* contain numerous letters of protest against accusations and expulsion orders. In one such letter, the author claimed that, as an Alsatian, he should be allowed to remain in the region until ratification of the peace treaty, at which point he would become 'properly' French anyway. He went on to claim that he was wrongly accused of having willingly served in the German army. He lists as referees, among others, François de Wendel along with nine others, including three mayors. However, the accompanying report shows that investigations for the *commission de triage* uncovered proof that the author had been closely involved with the German administration before the war and that, among other things, during annexation, he had been a close friend of General Lochow, 'Gouverneur détesté de Thionville'.<sup>85</sup> The investigations into the author's past, carried out for the *commission*, appear to have been extremely thorough, although his claim to French nationality was nonetheless justified. Despite this, the conclusion of the investigations was to proceed with his expulsion, as well as that of his mother.

A very different letter, from an innkeeper in Metz, also asks for his case to be reconsidered.<sup>86</sup> He was summoned to appear before the *commission d'examen des étrangers* in Metz on 25 October 1919. However, not knowing prior to his hearing either the accusations against him or his accuser, he was unable to defend himself properly. At the hearing he learned the identity of his accuser, and discovered that it was, in fact, the father of a business competitor with whom he was on particularly poor terms. Attached to the letter is a petition with the signatures and addresses of eight

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<sup>85</sup> ADM, 5 R 549.



*commerçants*, all vouching for the innkeeper. Unfortunately, the outcome of this case is not indicated.

Obviously, not all denunciations were invented by opportunists or business competitors. It was certainly necessary to expose those Germans who posed a very real threat to the political stability and security of the region, a procedure the new authorities, who had not witnessed the period of German rule, were unable to carry out without some assistance from the populations. However, in the miserable atmosphere created in the post-war period by the expulsions, why was such a great effort required in order to persuade the German immigrants to make their way 'back to Germany'? Germany, in the post-war years, presented a most unappealing destination for many Germans who considered Elsaß-Lothringen to be their home. Many had lived there all their lives and did not consider themselves to be 'immigrants'. Large numbers of them had broken ties with their native German regions, and without the existence of modern communications, had lost touch with those they had left behind.<sup>87</sup> As well as this, Germany was politically unstable. The creation of a republic, led by the socialist SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), was a singularly unappealing combination for the professional middle classes. Indeed, it would be inaccurate to say that they were all 'returning' to Germany. Many of them had been born in the regions, considered themselves Elsaß-Lothringer, and found it almost impossible to consider a future anywhere else. It was inevitable that, amongst those resisting departure, were some truly 'undesirable' elements who would do everything within their powers to remain and oppose the new regime. But this only partially excuses the enthusiasm to

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<sup>86</sup> ADM, 304 M 154. Letter of 3 November 1919 and addressed to the president of the *commission d'examen des étrangers*, Metz.

<sup>87</sup> Schillinger, 'Metz de l'Allemagne à la France', in *Annuaire de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de la Lorraine*, Metz, 1974, pp.123-131, p.125.

denounce. The viciousness of so many of the denunciations and the sheer number of false accusations, have cast a very dark shadow over the inter-war history of the region. It is perhaps this, more than anything, which has produced such a stubborn reluctance to record the history of this period. Few have been willing to ask questions of those who lived through this, either as denouncers, or as denounced.

### *Limits to épuration*

L'heure est venue de faire trêve à ces fâcheuses méprises  
et que sans renoncer pour autant aux expulsions dûment  
reconnues nécessaires il soit mis un terme aux autres, aux  
rigueurs injustifiées.<sup>88</sup>

The desire to 'tone down' the *épuration* process was increasingly voiced from 1919 onwards. However, the true extent of the damage caused by the *commissions de triage* and the denunciations was not recognized until the mid to late 1920s. Initially, public opinion supported the departure of Germans in their droves, and responses from public figures seem to attempt to reflect such support. According to a deputy from the Meurthe-et-Moselle, 'On est d'une extrême faiblesse vis-à-vis des boches et on les tolère beaucoup trop. On pourrait certainement en faire expulser encore beaucoup pour le bien du pays.'<sup>89</sup> The newspaper, *Le Thionvillois*, urged that *épuration* should be accomplished 'sans faiblesse mais avec esprit de méthode et de justice'.<sup>90</sup> Yet, it is hard to know how enthusiastic most *indigènes* actually were in private. An extract quoted in a report from the *Contrôle postal* in Metz for November 1918, states that

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<sup>88</sup> CARAN AJ/30/296. Letter from General J. Stuhl, senator for the Moselle region, sent to the Président du conseil, 2 March 1925.

<sup>89</sup> CARAN AJ/30/231. Letter from a deputy in the Meurthe-et-Moselle, undated.

<sup>90</sup> *Le Thionvillois*, 21 March 1919.



the expulsion of the mayor of St Avold, who had, in fact, done a great deal during the war to protect the citizens of the town from martial law, was a grave error. 'Je croyais l'esprit français plus large que cela et on verra trop tard que l'on a fait une faute.'<sup>91</sup>

The report of 5 January 1919 concluded that, whilst the *indigènes* increasingly desired the expulsion of German immigrants from the region, they feared that, 'les mesures prises à leur égard ne soient empreintes d'une trop grande indulgence et exécutées avec trop de bienveillances.'<sup>92</sup> As with so many similar situations, it is likely that *épuration* of the population was supported in theory, whilst in practice it was distressing to witness, especially when the *expulsés* were neighbours or acquaintances.

Needless to say, voicing such regret was not without its unpleasant consequences. There were, for example, very few forums for the expression of private fears during a period of censorship and postal controls. Equally, sentiment was persistently viewed in black and white terms, and setting out misgivings about the expulsion of the enemy would undoubtedly have been swiftly interpreted as Germanophilia or even Pangermanism. The imprisonment of Victor Demange, founding editor of the *Metzer Freies Journal*, was due, in part, to his enunciation of the problems afflicting the region including the arbitrary nature of the *épuration* process.<sup>93</sup> However, the expression of such views was not always motivated by a sense of dismay at the handling of the situation. More importantly, the departure of thousands of German immigrants had significant economic consequences for the region, more so even than for Alsace, and it was for this reason that a revision of the

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<sup>91</sup> Château de Vincennes, 16 N 1464. Report for the week 25-30 November 1918, extract 15.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, pp.211-224.

policy was more openly demanded by various individuals. 'Ne va-t-on pas ruiner notre province en la privant de ses commerçants, de ses industriels, de ses ouvriers?'<sup>94</sup>

The *Revue de la presse alsacienne* dated 29 August 1919, reported that the *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine* had demanded the mass expulsion of German workers 'sans tenir compte du point de vue économique'.<sup>95</sup> However, the *Lothringer Volkszeitung* claimed that public opinion in the Moselle rejected a policy based solely upon sentiment. The lack of a skilled workforce in the Moselle could not be quickly remedied by employing foreign workers, as they were seldom adequately qualified for the task. Although German workers were often seen as the instigators of strikes, some form of judicial statute could be created which would prevent this by threatening troublemakers with expulsion. In fact, in a report from Mirman to the *administrateur* in Sarreguemines, dated 25 February 1919, section VIII states, 'il ne faut pas expulser un allemand même du groupe 4 [D] qu'après s'être préoccupé de son "utilité" économique'.<sup>96</sup> Mirman was concerned, though, that every effort be made to replace Germans as quickly as possible. He also states that, for example, no German farmers would be expelled from the region until a *mosellan* farmer was ready to step in and continue farming the land. Neither would an industrialist, employing a large workforce, be expelled until his immediate replacement was guaranteed, thereby safeguarding the future of production as well as of employees.

The *Messin* newspaper addressed other side-effects of the mass departure of Germans. In an article entitled 'L'expulsion des Indésirables et le repeuplement de la Lorraine par des Français', which appeared on 30 April 1919, the writer explains that,

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<sup>94</sup> *Le Messin*, 2 May 1919, quoted in Brasme, 'Expulsions et Rapatriements', in *Bulletin de Liaison de l'ANSBV*, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.17.

<sup>95</sup> ADBR, 121 AL 162. This review of the press, carried out by the new French administration, regularly featured articles from the *mosellane* press.

<sup>96</sup> ADM, 26 Z 26. It is assumed here that all Germans were in 'group 4' or category D.



whilst the indigenous population viewed the departure of ‘des êtres grossiers et malfaisants’ with relief, there were also damaging side-effects of the loss of such large numbers of the population, especially for landlords and *commerçants*. Indeed, despite having been among the first to refuse to do business with Germans and to demand their expulsion, shopkeepers and small businessmen were also among the first to suffer from a loss of customers and a dramatic drop in income.<sup>97</sup> Needless to say, the solution proposed in the *Messin* was not to slow down the departures of Germans, but to speed up the arrival of suitable replacements from the French interior.

Arrangements were indeed made to allow certain German workers to remain in the region. For example, a letter from the De Wendel company in Hayange, dated 26 April 1921, includes a list of German miners whose conduct had apparently never been the subject of complaints, and to whom, according to the company, it would be acceptable to award work permits. Another letter, sent from the *Sous-Préfet* in Sarreguemines dated 1 July 1925, states that within the *arrondissement* of Sarreguemines, a total of 264 Germans were employed in agriculture and industry. The *Sous-Préfet* goes on to recommend that in order to resolve the serious shortage of labour in the region, ‘l’emploi d’ouvriers agricoles allemands, semble, étant donné la situation géographique du département de la Moselle, pouvoir remédier à la crise.’<sup>98</sup> Other, perhaps more minor, inconveniences were experienced by the often sudden departure of individuals. For example, on 9 January 1919, the *commissaire de la République* in Metz wrote to the mayor of the city, pointing out that the expulsion of

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<sup>97</sup> Brasme, ‘Expulsions et Rapatriements’, in *Bulletin de Liaison de l’ANSBV*, No. 18, 1991, pp.53-59. Copy held in ADM, pp.1-23, p.17.

<sup>98</sup> ADM, 310 M 50.

the German police doctor meant that medical supervision of prostitutes in the city was being neglected.<sup>99</sup>

The sense of regret at the manner in which *épuration* took place, the delays in finding French replacements, and the fear that the process would, in fact, have serious economic consequences for the region, all appear to have influenced the new regime's approach to the policy of expulsion, as well as persuading Germans to leave the region. However, it was ultimately the Treaty of Versailles itself which had the greatest impact on the treatment and destiny of the region's *indésirables*. The most important reason for avoiding the mass expulsion of the many thousands of Germans residing in the region at the end of the war, was never addressed by the new administration. Just as they failed to understand the subtleties of language, religion, and education within the region, so they failed to recognize the overriding economic and social need for an avoidance of a dramatic and devastating demographic rupture, along the lines of that which had occurred in the 1870s. Instead of preaching caution, and assisting in creating a calm and reflective atmosphere, the new administration gave its blessing to the witch-hunt, encouraging vengeance. The example set during the political void period between the armistice and the arrival of French troops, where the region's *Nationalrat* set about maintaining stability and security within the regions, was to have no impact on the incoming administration. Again, the long-term effects were only guessed at by a few, more perceptive, observers within the population.

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<sup>99</sup> ADM, 304 M 2.



### *Naturalisations*

Article 79 of the Treaty of Versailles allowed Germans to apply for French citizenship through a process of naturalisation.<sup>100</sup> This contrasted with the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871, which, although it granted German citizenship to all *Mosellans* and Alsatians living in the regions, compelled those who wished to remain French to leave the region and become domiciled in France. The terms of the Treaty of Versailles were not received without protest in the regions and in the French interior. Many were outraged at the prospect of any German being able to acquire French nationality through the naturalisation process. However, it meant that the indigenous population, at least, acquired French citizenship without any great formality. In any case, the 1849 law, which allowed the French authorities to expel those who posed a political threat, continued to apply. Equally, the naturalisation process was most rigorous, and several conditions had to be met before citizenship was awarded. For example, the applicant had to have been domiciled in the Moselle or Alsace for three consecutive years prior to 3 August 1914.

In an interview published in *Le Petit Parisien* in May 1919, Millerand addressed the question of naturalisations in suitably mild terms. 'Le traité lu mercredi à Versailles prévoit un droit d'option pour les Allemands résidant en Alsace-Lorraine et qui pourront, sauf refus du gouvernement français, opter pour la nationalité française.'<sup>101</sup> Millerand was as aware as any that the news of naturalisations would be met with resistance in certain sections of society. For example, the *Union nationale des combattants de Moyeuve-Grande* expressed their sense of outrage at the prospect not only of Germans living on French soil, but of Germans acquiring French

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<sup>100</sup> See Appendix II.

nationality, and with it, the right to vote.<sup>102</sup> Referring to the forthcoming elections in his interview, Millerand went on to state, 'Il restera à inscrire les Français et les Alsaciens-Lorrains réintégrés dans la nationalité française, et ceux qui auront opté.' Between 1920 and 1921, an overwhelming number of 95,893 applications for naturalisation were received by the French authorities.<sup>103</sup> The desire to remain in the regions was not lessened by the anti-German policy of *épuration*, or by the time involved in the processing of applications. Many of those applying were married to *Mosellans* and Alsatians.

By 27 July 1922, a total of 35,001 foreigners had been granted French citizenship in the Moselle through the process of naturalisation, but not all of these foreigners were German. Of this figure, 12,000 were eligible to vote. In the Bas Rhin, the total was 27,470, of whom 8,600 could vote, and in the Haut Rhin, 14,593 were naturalized, of whom 4,600 could vote.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear how many of these were of German origin, or how many were married to *Mosellans* and Alsatians. For example, between 1921 and 1930, 60% of workers in the iron and steel industry were foreigners, but only 40% of them were of German origin.

On 18 March 1922, *abbé* Louis Hackspill, editor of the *Lothringer Volkszeitung*, addressed the question of naturalisations and set out a number of the points which had arisen as a result of Germans acquiring French nationality. His article dealt head on with the question of sentiment with regard to nationality, and acknowledged that not all applications for naturalisation were motivated by a deep sympathy for, or love of, France. On the contrary, many were simply motivated by

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<sup>101</sup> Article sent to the British Foreign Office, 11 May 1919. PRO, FO 371 3748, subject 'Problems of new administration'.

<sup>102</sup> CARAN, AJ/30/296.

<sup>103</sup> PRO, FO 371/6990, report from Sir M Cheetham in Paris to the Foreign Office in London entitled 'Political situation in Alsace Lorraine September, 1921', section 19.



financial or family considerations. Clearly, the state was perfectly within its rights to refuse French citizenship to those it believed undesirable or those who would clearly abuse the privilege and pose a threat to French rule in the provinces. Nonetheless, it was unreasonable to expect those of German origin to manifest strongly patriotic sentiment towards France overnight. Many of them were already partially assimilated having married *Mosellans* and Alsatians during German rule, as well as having lived alongside them as neighbours and colleagues for almost half a century. But, the *abbé* reasoned, it was not this generation of Germans who should be expected to manifest pro-French patriotism. It was their children, who, given the right atmosphere for assimilation, might become true French men and women. The authorities, therefore, should not become so hypnotized by the threat of German propagandists supporting the autonomist movement, but should allow the population to recover from the loss of life incurred by the war, and the lamentably low birth-rate by granting French citizenship more freely to German applicants.<sup>105</sup> This was a situation which politicians and political commentators would worry away at during the remainder of the 1920s and the 1930s, as individual cases highlighted the complexity of the arrangement, until the outbreak of the Second World War annulled all their efforts.

### *Epuration: the results*

By 1921, the *épuración* process had largely achieved its principal objective: the departure of the majority of German immigrants, including Austro-Hungarians, from the region. Approximately 100,000 German immigrants and undesirable *indigènes* from the Moselle had crossed the new national frontiers into Germany to start new

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<sup>104</sup> CARAN AJ/30/296. Those eligible to vote were males over the age of 18.

lives. The Moselle had been almost completely ethnically cleansed. Only those required for 'economic reasons' or who were married to *indigènes* had slipped through the net. A fraction of the total departures involved expulsions. The vast majority were made by those who had opted for 'voluntary' repatriation. Yet, the evidence presented here suggests that the *voluntary* nature of these departures is questionable. What then was the reality of the voluntary departures? And how does the nature of these departures fit in with Wahl's idea of a liberal policy towards questions of nationality?

On the face of it, there were very few differences between voluntary repatriation and expulsion. In the early stages, when most departures occurred, both methods placed exactly the same tight restrictions on the amount of luggage and money individuals were permitted to carry. Each dictated the time and place of departure. Each involved the segregation of men and women for the duration of the journey into Germany, an uncomfortable journey which could take several days. And upon arrival in Germany, both *expulsés* and *rapatriés* faced the same problems, that is, refugee status, a lack of money, no accommodation, and arriving in a country in disarray, and on the brink of economic collapse. Why then opt for voluntary repatriation? Why not wait and see if expulsion papers would arrive at all as the process amounted to the same in the end?

In its favour, opting for voluntary repatriation avoided a process which could involve denunciation, arrest, police enquiries, and possible imprisonment. Likewise, the expulsion process was unpredictable. As the letters quoted at the beginning of this chapter show, no-one knew who would be next to be summoned before the *commission de triage* or the *commission d'examen des étrangers*. Voluntary

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<sup>105</sup> The intensity of similar problems which continue to preoccupy the French authorities today with regard to the immigrant population, suggest Hackspill was fighting a losing battle against prejudice.



repatriation allowed families to avoid such uncertainty. Yet the reason voluntary repatriation became such a popular option had little to do with the desire to avoid expulsion. Those who temporarily prolonged their residency in the Moselle, found that everyday life contained numerous pitfalls and dangers. After 10 pm the use of German in public places was forbidden and many shops put up signs stating that they no longer served 'Boches'. The exchange rates for card D holders were considerably lower than for card A holders. Equally, jobs for Germans were increasingly rare which led to unemployment. This, in turn, resulted in an increased risk of expulsion, as the unemployed were placed high on the list of those to be expelled. However, the greatest problem for those Germans seeking to remain in the region was not actually the inconveniences and obstacles placed in their way by the new authorities. The greatest fear stemmed from the threat of physical violence and intimidation. The newspapers do not report such behaviour. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, Germans were attacked. Indeed, such attacks were witnessed in the streets of Metz during the liberation celebrations.<sup>106</sup> A small number of *indigènes* who now felt they had the upper hand in the region, were willing to indulge their desire for vengeance. It seems, therefore, that in every way possible, life was made as awkward and as unpleasant as possible for German immigrants who attempted to remain. Voluntary repatriation, therefore, despite its drawbacks, indignity, and sacrifice, became the best option.

This was the reality of voluntary repatriation and of the process of *épuration*. This was the 'liberal' approach for which Wahl congratulates the new French regime. Where Wahl refers to 'abus inévitables', is he really referring to the whole policy of voluntary repatriation, or is he singling out a few cases of denunciation, and a few

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<sup>106</sup> In her diary, K mentions these attacks. Entry of 8 December 1918. See also chapter VI, p.221.

hasty expulsions? On paper, perhaps the French authorities *were* more liberal than their German counterparts when it came to the terms of the 1871 and 1918 peace treaties, if such comparisons are valid. However, a policy of *épuration* was in operation long before the Paris Peace Conference even convened.

### *Concluding remarks*

*Épuration* was a response to public calls within France to remove all enemy subjects from French soil following the war, and following German atrocities elsewhere in occupied France. It was also a response to public opinion within the provinces from those seeking vengeance for their treatment at the hands of the German regime during the war. And finally, *épuration* was a response from the French government and French military authorities, who felt the only way to secure the regions and to implement a policy of *francisisation* was to bring about the departure of all Germans, and to racially cleanse the Moselle and Alsace. They did this by expelling those they considered *indésirables*, but more importantly, by coercing thousands of individuals and families into opting for voluntary repatriation. However, apart from free-lance denunciators and vigilante groups turning up at people's homes and places of work to 'persuade' them to leave the regions, *épuration* required initiative, authorisation, and instructions from above. How things were determined in Paris still requires more focused research. On the ground in the Moselle, though, without any reference to the Treaty of Versailles, administrators and military personnel combined orders from Paris with their hatred of Germans to make *épuration* of the population very effective indeed.



### Summary

Between December 1918 and the end of 1921, the French authorities attempted to cleanse the Moselle region of its German immigrant population as part of an overall programme of *francisation* in the returned provinces. Their methods involved the use of a system of classifying the population according to individuals' ethnic origins. This allowed all enemy subjects to be grouped together. The next step involved the expulsion of all 'undesirable elements', which included *indigènes* guilty of collaborating with the German authorities during the war. In order to assist the authorities in identifying such *indésirables*, *commissions de triage* were set up. However, these tribunals had no legal basis, and their methods created a direct infringement on the human rights of the accused. They were used largely to deal with *indigènes*, whilst German immigrants were brought before *commissions d'examen des étrangers*. Those issued with expulsion papers then faced an undignified journey to Germany on special trains. Limitations to the weight of luggage and amount of money carried were enforced. Men and women were obliged to travel separately, and the journey often took several days. Those who managed to avoid being expelled, though, were not much better off. They often found themselves the subject of denunciations sent to the French authorities. Equally, efforts to make life as difficult as possible for them forced many to opt for voluntary repatriation to Germany. Yet *rapatriés* departed in the same way as *expulsés*, which also meant the sequestration and liquidation of their property. In all, the policy of *épuration*, whether through expulsion or voluntary repatriation procedures, succeeded in removing nearly 100,000 German immigrants from the Moselle. Only a very few were able to return following the Treaty of Versailles which allowed for a limited number of naturalisations.

# Chapter VI

## From War to Peace: Change and Adaptation

The experience of those expelled from the Moselle or repatriated to Germany was one of hardship, uncertainty, and, in so many cases, utter misery. But, what of the *indigènes* who remained in the region, who lived through the months of dramatic change, of bewildering or joyous integration, of adaptation as radical and as disorientating as the experience of almost half a century before? What was their experience? What were their concerns, fears, hopes, and ambitions? To what extent did the return of French sovereignty to the region alter their lives and to what extent did they simply continue as before, unruffled by the politicking of Paris, Berlin, London and Washington and more concerned with the everyday routine of births, deaths, and marriages, of harvests and food prices, train delays and unseasonable weather?

This chapter uses as its principal source the diary of a young woman, referred to here as K<sup>1</sup>. The complete diary spans most of K's adolescent and adult life. The years 1916 to 1925 have been examined here. Correspondence with K's sister, G, has revealed that the diary was not written for posterity, but simply as a record of events to be remembered by the immediate family. Nevertheless, at times it seems to provide a cathartic effect<sup>2</sup>. Unlike, for example, the diary of a politician or public figure, this document does not seek to justify, excuse, or explain grand events or actions. Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> The diaries were lent to the author on the condition that the family be allowed to remain anonymous.

<sup>2</sup> The family tradition of keeping a diary had already been established by the sisters' grandfather, whose entries during the Franco-Prussian war are as enlightening and moving as K's for the First World War and its aftermath.



it presents a very personal, intimate and simple account of a young woman's life, which contains some reference to current affairs and international events.

Rich though this source is, it still presents the same difficulties and restrictions so familiar with all historical documents. Firstly, the author represents only one inhabitant of the Moselle. However, the lives of her family and friends, as well as the inhabitants of the village of Peltre<sup>3</sup> are gradually revealed in the entries. Likewise, G is aware of the existence of other viewpoints and other mentalities: 'Naturellement la vie des uns n'est pas tout à fait conforme à celle des autres, il y a des variantes d'une famille à l'autre. Ce n'est pas drôle d'habiter les pays frontières où l'on passe d'une nationalité à une autre.'<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the diary tells us little of the experiences of German immigrants, for example, who continued to live in the region after the war, or of the whole expulsion and repatriation process described in the previous chapter. However, this is neither surprising, nor particularly significant. The village of Peltre had very few German inhabitants once the troops, housed in nearby barracks, and the wounded, nursed in the village convent, had been evacuated at the end of the war. Indeed, such omissions tell us more, rather than less, about how individuals and their families coped with these events during such disruptive times. A source such as this often requires as much interpretation of what it does *not* say (the role of the historian as detective becomes necessary here) as of what it does say. As a contribution to historical memory, this diary provides the most intimate of eye-witness accounts and it will be used in this chapter alongside archival documents which help to broaden the picture of everyday life as it was in the aftermath of the First World War in the Moselle region.

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<sup>3</sup> Peltre is a small village situated approximately 5 kilometres south east of Metz. In 1910, its population numbered 816.

### *Family and village life*

K was the daughter of a primary school teacher and was born in 1893, 22 years after the formal annexation by Germany of the Moselle region. Living as they did in Peltre, the family was Francophone and staunchly Francophile, but had opted to remain in the Moselle despite their obligation to take German nationality. As a school teacher, K's father spoke and taught in both French and German throughout annexation, despite being reproached by the German authorities, as well as by fellow teachers, for using French too readily to explain lessons to pupils.<sup>5</sup> He argued, however, that, as most of the children came from Francophone families, their progress would only be hindered if they were denied explanations in their mother tongue.

As well as carrying out his functions in the village school, the job also brought with it the responsibility of acting as the mayor's secretary. Duties ranged from recording statistics at harvest time, to organising requisitions made during the war, as well as ensuring the distribution of food tokens for rationing afterwards. Numerous extra duties were incurred as the *Maison mère des soeurs de la Providence de St André* was to be found in Peltre.<sup>6</sup> Nuns arrived from all over France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg to join the convent. The issue of identity papers and other administrative procedures relating to the nuns fell to the mayor's secretary. Furthermore, during the war, German officers were regularly billeted on the family's house. With the signing of the armistice in November 1918, the billeting continued, only this time with French officers.

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<sup>4</sup> In a letter to the author from G, 14 June 1998.

<sup>5</sup> The German authorities initially allowed the use of French in classes within the francophone sector of the Moselle, and then attempted to phase it out gradually during annexation.

<sup>6</sup> See André, Marie, *Il cherchait des pierres. Vie de Monsieur l'abbé A. Gapp, fondateur de la congrégation des soeurs de la Providence de Saint-André*, Paris, 1957.



The family was devoutly Catholic, which was typical in the Moselle, particularly in the Francophone sector. K and her sister and mother attended church services or *offices* almost every day of the week, in order to take communion or attend vespers, to attend special masses for the war dead, to commemorate the anniversary of the death of a family member, or, as on one rather unusual occasion, to offer up prayers for rain during a particularly severe drought.<sup>7</sup> There was a great deal of contact with the nuns in the convent through the father's work in the school, and also as K and G were often called upon to assist in services in the convent's chapel. Both sisters went to school there. Also, K owned a camera and frequently took portraits of the nuns or of distinguished visitors.

K and G had a brother who was born in 1887. At the outbreak of war in 1914, as he was nearing the completion of his medical studies, he was called up to the German army and sent to the Vosges region for front-line duty. In September 1914, he was killed. As the only son, and as a popular and much loved member of his family and the community, his death caused enormous sadness and suffering, not least because he died fighting on the side of the German *Reich* and against his family's beloved France. His parents made several visits to the Vosges in an effort to find his remains. However, despite having dental records, they were never successful. On one occasion, a body from an unmarked grave was exhumed, but the dentition did not match that of their son.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, in the early stages of the war, soldiers did not wear identity bracelets. Each year, a mass was held to mark the anniversary of his death.

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<sup>7</sup> Entries in July 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Entry of 9 October 1922.

There was further tragedy in 1925, as, after the late diagnosis of cancer, the sisters' mother died. Whether because of the death of her mother and the subsequent need to take care of both her father and younger sister (G was only 13 when her mother died), or simply because of the disruptive circumstances which afflicted her life during and after the war K and G were never married. As G recently wrote,

Notre vie n'a pas été très gaie et K, décédée à 104 ans  
[in 1997], a vu disparaître presque tous les membres de  
la famille. Il reste des descendants éparpillés un peu  
partout sur l'hexagone et que nous ne connaissons même  
plus.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of their family upbringing and the strict adherence to Catholic tradition, neither sister ever embarked upon a career, or took up paid employment of any kind, except during the Second World War when they were forced to work under the Nazi administration. Between 1920 and 1921, upon the retirement of their father from his duties both as a teacher and as the mayor's secretary, the family moved house within the village of Peltre. The two sisters remained in that house until they were unable to tend the grounds or afford its upkeep, having been entirely dependent upon their father for any income. It was sold in 1965 and they moved to a flat in Metz. The death of their father in 1941 had brought the loss of his pension and a large portion of the sisters' income. The greatest, if not the saddest, irony of his death was that, after the anguish of annexation in 1871 and the joy of the reunion 47 years later, he did not live long enough to witness his region's return to France in 1945 after the second, Nazi annexation. He and many other staunch French patriots from his generation who died

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<sup>9</sup> In a letter to the author from G, 22 November 1998.



during the Second World War were said to have died of disillusionment, of a broken heart.

### *The impact of war*

Although the front-line was some distance to the south of Peltre with Allied and German troops locked into muddy battle in the Meurthe-et-Moselle region, there was considerable military activity in the surrounding area, especially at the beginning and end of the war. In particular, aerial bombardments caused damage around Marly, Sablon, as well as Metz itself.<sup>10</sup> These bombings were not particularly accurate in those early days, and often the risk was greater from plane crashes rather than from the bombs themselves. On one occasion, a French plane manned by two Englishmen, who were slightly injured, was brought down between Peltre and Pouilly. Many rushed to see the wreck despite the continuing danger caused by the aircraft which were still overhead.<sup>11</sup>

During much of 1918, however, K notes that the family, as well as their various *officiers*, spent many nights in an inadequate shelter in the garden. They could hear the sound of bombing over nearby munitions stores and factories and, on occasion, fires would light up the sky as misdirected bombs and explosions ignited hay or straw in farm buildings. On 12 September, K noted, 'Le canon a marché toute la nuit d'une façon effrayante. On aurait cru que c'était tout près'. That afternoon, two bombs had landed on bridges in Metz, whilst, a few miles away, the family continued with the task

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<sup>10</sup> See Clout, Hugh, 'Rural revival: the recovery of the Moselle after World War I', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 1994 NS2(4) pp.395-403. Clout points out that compared to other areas affected by front-line fighting, the Moselle was not classified as 'devastated' and repair of damage was classified as *reconstitution*. Most of the damage was caused by the transportation of military supplies and troops to and from the front, as well as by the plundering of farmland and farm buildings for food by the retreating German army.

<sup>11</sup> Entry of 14 September 1918.

of jam-making. But the length and nature of the war created a tremendous weariness. The sound of the bombing, which caused the window panes to rattle incessantly, seldom allowed the family to sleep before 2am. And yet they continued, as normal, with their everyday chores during the day, most of which related to the preparation of food supplies which would see the family through the winter.

Reliable news of the progress of the war was scarce. Rumours, therefore, played a large part in the outlook of the family as well as the local community. In early September, it was claimed the Americans were making such good progress that they would soon arrive. A month later, it was again thought the Americans were almost on the Moselle's doorstep and on 10 October, it was declared that an armistice had been signed, 'ce qui n'est pas vrai, car les aëros viennent encore...'. This was followed on 28 October by a rumour, spread by the German district administration (*der Kreisdirektion*) in Ancerville,<sup>12</sup> that if Alsace-Lorraine was to become French again, the Germans would operate a 'scorched earth policy'. Although the region was only a matter of weeks from the end of the war, the German authorities still played on the anxiety and uncertainty of the populations.

In mid-September villagers evacuated from areas closer to the front passed through Peltre, whose main street was constantly filled with carts and wagons carrying the young and old, and who had been forced to leave their homes and their possessions behind. The inhabitants of Peltre were instructed not to take in any of the evacuees because of the military presence in the village. At this time, K's father was told to prepare for the arrival of more troops who were to be accommodated in the school itself. Twice, soldiers had even camped in the garden of K's aunt. On 26 September, the order arrived for the nuns to evacuate the convent so that it could be made into a



hospital. In the midst of the chaos, K admits after a night of bombardments, 'on est tout à fait désorienté'. Yet the next day she and her father went to Pouilly in the afternoon, and she declared, 'c'est un plaisir de ramasser des champignons, car il y en a beaucoup depuis les pluies qu'on a eues.'<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, by October 1918, the communities in Peltre and the surrounding area sensed that the end of the war was close, but not quite upon them. 'La guerre n'est pas encore fini, car le canon gronde encore bien fort'.<sup>14</sup> The movement of troops, the delays to trains, the quick succession of rumours, were all reminiscent of the very early days of the war. The number of wounded in the convent increased daily, and by 4 November there were at least 200. The aeroplanes still passed until late at night, German officers still arrived to be lodged by the family, and yet on 5 November, K noted that, 'on s'occupe de tous les côtés à préparer des drapeaux comme on peut, car il n'y a plus moyen de trouver du bleu à Metz'. Two days later, news of 'de gros troubles' in Berlin and Kiel reached them. From this point, the usually short, unemotional entries in K's diary are replaced with detail and excitement. On 8 November, their officer returned to the house to say that a great battle was taking place, and that the Germans were waiting for the Americans to reach them. 'On ne peut pas dormir, le canon fait trembler nos fenêtres continuellement. La Bavière est république, le roi est jeté bas; ils ont sûrement peur que les alliés n'entrent par l'Autriche...'.<sup>15</sup>

The constant flow of soldiers, evacuees, and horses, combined with almost constant rain, turned the street outside the family's house into deep mud making it

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<sup>12</sup> K's family owned property which they let in this village, south east of Peltre.

<sup>13</sup> Entry of 27 September 1918.

<sup>14</sup> Entry of 29 October 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

almost impossible to go out. On 9 November, K noted that everyone was returning terrified from Metz.

Les rouges saisissent tous les fusils des autres soldats.

Ils arrachent les épaulettes de tous les officiers qu'ils

rencontrent et les désarment complètement. Ils ont la

baonette [sic.] en main pour les récalcitrants.

By the afternoon, order had been restored. 'Les révolutionnaires ont plein pouvoir à la mairie de Metz et partout le drapeau rouge flotte de tous les côtés.' Almost all the German soldiers were wearing red rosettes. The family's officer had said his farewells that morning and his luggage had already been collected, but he was scared to go to Metz, and so remained for some time at the house. He eventually departed only to return at 2am, to K's irritation.<sup>16</sup> Germany, she stated, had accepted the conditions of peace, even though they were harsh. 'Ils sentent qu'ils sont à bout. Il est temps'. Despite this, the aeroplanes returned, hitting a tram in Metz and killing several people. Even on the eve of peace, she declared, the guns still sounded. They continued to sound until 6pm on 11 November, at which time the armistice, signed that day at midday, came into effect. 'Les troupes se sauvent déjà. ... Ils en passent jour et nuit, car ils s'en vont presque tous à pied...Bon voyage... Les blessés qui sont obligés de suivrent font pitié.' Pages from K's diary for 11 November are reproduced below in figure 7.

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<sup>16</sup> Entry of 10 November 1918.



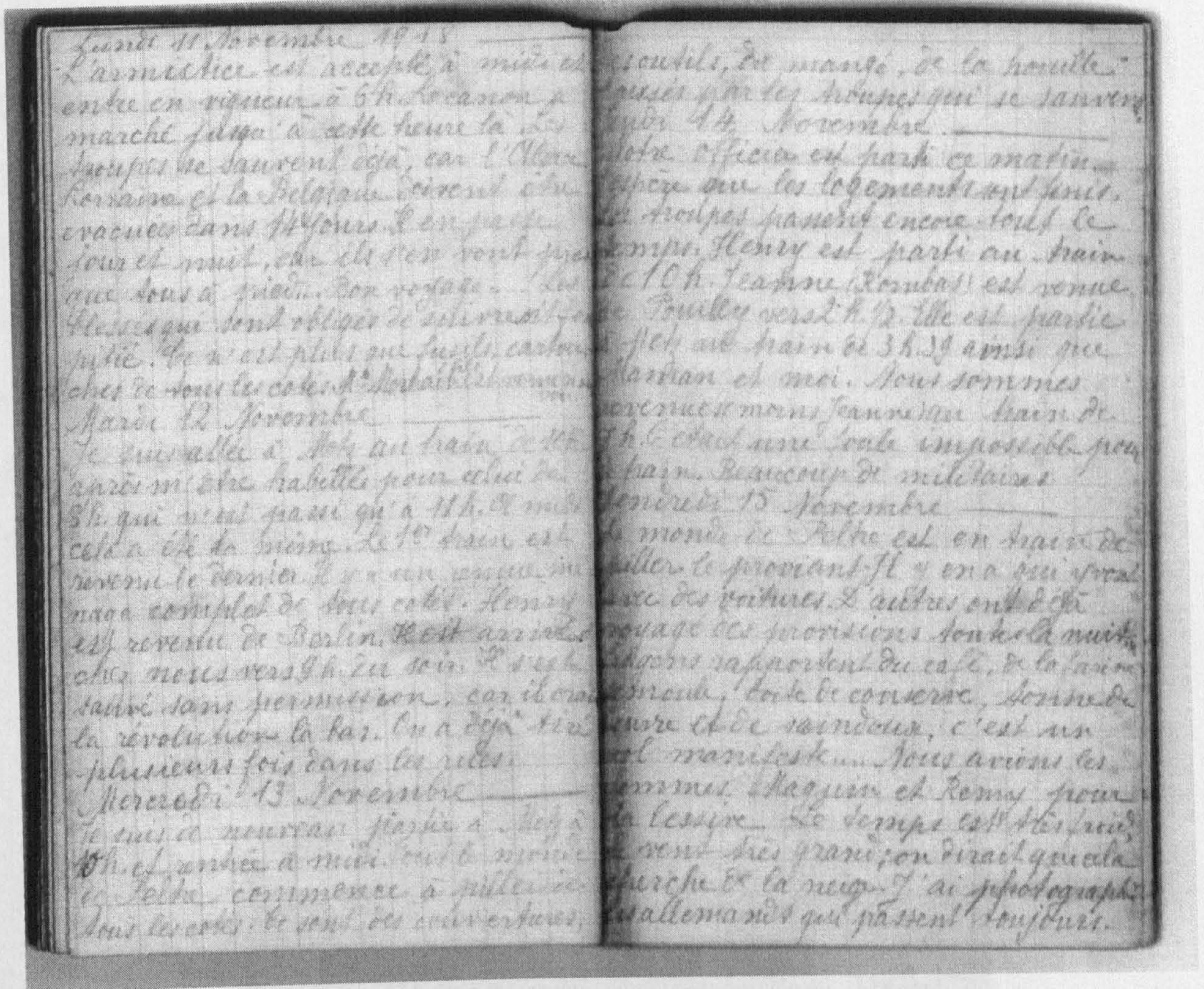
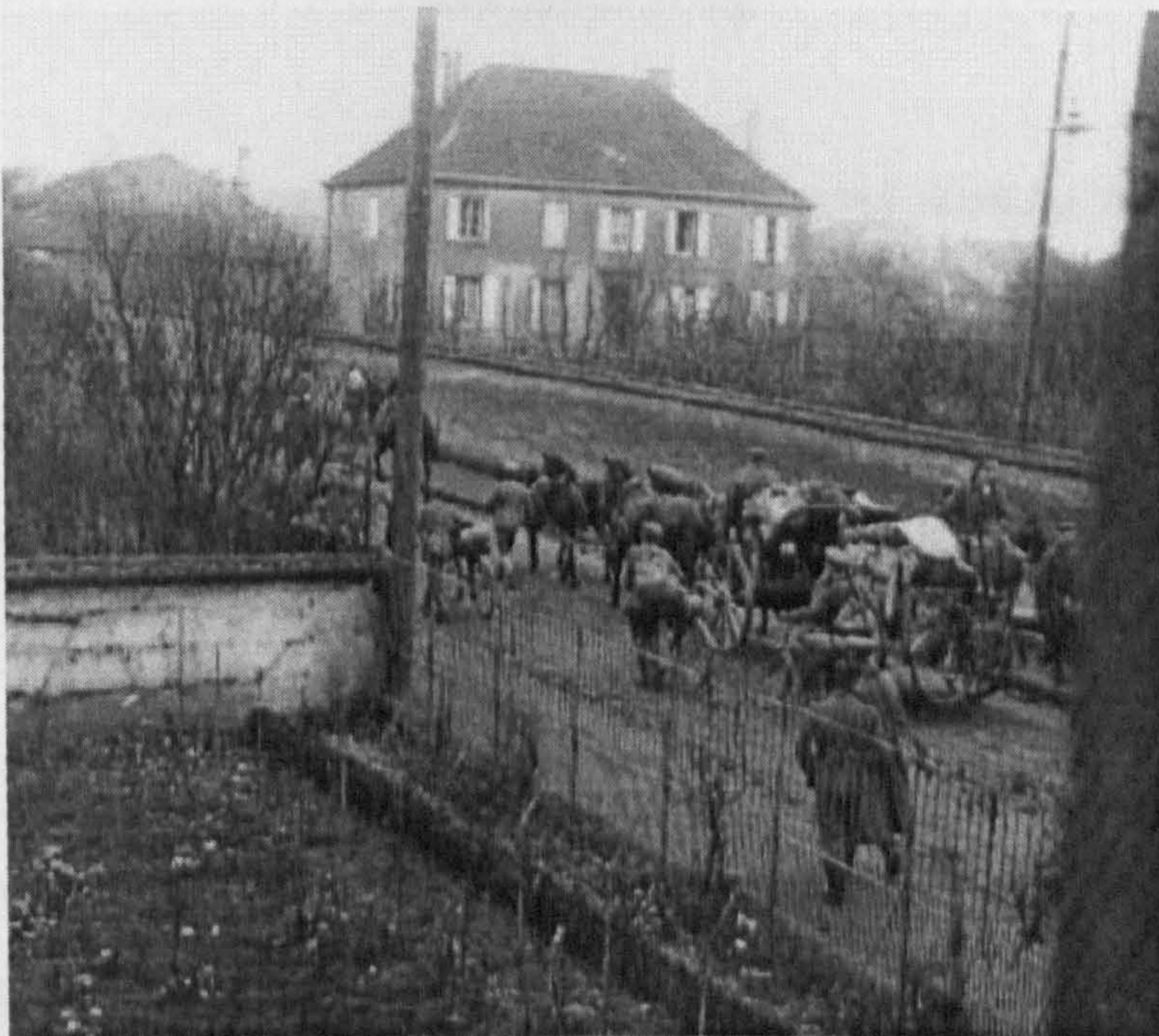


Figure 7: Extract from K's diary, 11 November 1918



### *The armistice*

During the days which followed the signing of the armistice, looting began. Military supply depots were the first to be attacked by local people, who were searching for food and fuel, but also taking tools and other useful materials they could find. In Metz they attacked shops owned or run by Germans. This went on day and night, some taking carts with them in order to carry more. Coffee, flour, semolina, tinned food, butter and lard were all taken. According to K, 'c'est un vol manifeste...'.<sup>17</sup> The weather had turned bitterly cold and they expected snow. But German troops continued to file through Peltre which, she notes, she photographed. Finally, the family's officer left, to K's relief. When she awoke on 16 November, the last of the German army had left.



**Figure 8: K's photograph of the departing German soldiers, taken on 15 November 1918.**

<sup>17</sup> Entry of 15 November 1918.





**Figure 9: K's photograph of the first French troops arriving in Peltre, 17 November 1918.**

K took photographs during the days when German troops retreated from the region, passing through Peltre, and French troops arrived, only days later. There is a clear contrast between the neat lines of French soldiers in Figure 9 and the depiction of demoralized German troops, disshevelled and with their heads bowed, in Figure 8.<sup>18</sup> With the arrival of the French army in the village, a French officer was billeted in the family house. To their delight, he was a Parisian teacher who had begun his first teaching post a year before the war began. The family stayed up until after midnight chatting to him. 'Il fait si bon, causer à ces français (sic).' K still set herself apart from 'these French', perhaps out of habit, or perhaps because, unlike her parents, she could not consider herself to be 'one of them' yet. After all, she still possessed German

<sup>18</sup> K mentions discreetly taking photographs of the retreating German soldiers in her diary entry of 15 November.



nationality. On 18 November, the first French newspaper was printed in Metz entitled *Le Lorrain, le Messin, le Courrier*.<sup>19</sup>

During this period of 'suspended animation', when the German army was in the process of departing and the French troops were arriving hot on their heels, one of the greatest inconveniences for K and her family was the disruption of the trains to Metz. There were no trains at all for several days after 18 November, and K's father was obliged to go on foot to Metz, in order to see the 'triumphant entry of French troops'. K and her mother and sister were invited to travel with their officer in his carriage, and arrived in style, taking up their places at the front of the crowd in time for the procession which began at 1.30pm French time. With the armistice and the occupation by French troops of Alsace-Lorraine, the region had lost an hour to bring it in line with the rest of France.

The celebrations were enthusiastically received by the crowds. French aeroplanes flew overhead doing acrobatics and dropping flags, postcards and rosettes. Unfortunately, one came down too low and got caught in the telegraph wires. According to K, there were some fatalities. The aircraft was completely destroyed, but the pilot survived.<sup>20</sup> Also, General Pétain, who was supposed to ride in at the head of the procession, was delayed by several days due to a riding accident. Nevertheless, K noted that the cavalry and infantry were 'en très bonne tenue'. Overall, she states, with the exception of some Germans who were to be found in the crowd, everyone was very pleased to see the French army.

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<sup>19</sup> The first edition of a French-language newspaper printed in the Moselle after the end of the war was a combined publication of these three newspapers, all of which had been banned by the German authorities at the beginning of the war. See also Figure 3, p.85, which shows the first delivery of French-language newspapers to the region at the end of the war.

<sup>20</sup> See Berrar, Jean-Claude, *Mémoire en Images. Metz*, Joué-Lès-Tours, 1996, p.109, which shows a photograph of the stricken plane in Place Royale, Metz.



Gradually, the benefits of the Allied success filtered through to the inhabitants of Peltre. On 24 November, they were able to have the first holy bread at communion since the outbreak of war. Food rationing was in operation and food tokens were in short supply, but meat could be found quite easily. It was with great surprise that K noted how white French bread was. The train service gradually improved, and soon the village was preoccupied with the issuing of travel and identity documents, which had to be signed by the army captain who was staying at the château in Peltre. Everyone had to declare themselves to the French military authorities. Meetings of the local council brought about the nomination of a new mayor, and lists were drawn up of candidates suitable for election under the new French administration. After months and years of martial law, food shortages, and general hardship, K was invited to a dance held by the officers billeted in Peltre.<sup>21</sup> About 14 or 15 officers entertained the local girls with singing and dancing. K and her friends returned home at 10.30pm, despite the officers' kind attempts to keep them longer. This was exactly the kind of event criticized by Pierri Zind as a blatant attempt by the French to 'seduce' the local inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> In fact, there was no need to 'seduce' K or her family. Their loyalties were already clear in their minds. However, as G has since pointed out, not all families or communities shared the same opinions as K and her family.

The series of events and festivities to mark the return of French sovereignty continued well into December. On 6 December, a large meeting was arranged at the convent in Peltre, in order to discuss the organisation of classes for teachers in the region who did not have adequate French. The *commissaire général*, Mirman, was

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<sup>21</sup> Entry of 1 December 1918.

<sup>22</sup> 'Les généraux faisaient venir des troupes reposées, sémillantes, habillées de neuf, prêtes pour les bals et les défilés, en vue de séduire les Alsaciens-Lorrains vaincus et affamés'. Zind, *Elsass Lothringen. Alsace Lorraine*, p.97.

expected to attend, and a great deal of trouble was taken to mark the occasion. Young girls in local costume were present and bouquets of flowers had been provided.

However, not only did Mirman not appear, but, to the consternation of the organizers, no replacement was sent. Even the smallest villages in the region were anxious to be recognized by the incoming French, as well as to be given the opportunity to welcome the new French hierarchy.

The next big event was the first official visit to the returned provinces by President Poincaré and his Prime Minister, Clemenceau. K joined the immense crowd which turned out to greet the dignitaries, and to see the American and French troops on parade. 'La joie tient du délire, on est si heureux d'être délivré'.<sup>23</sup> Local girls in traditional costume lined the route, and flowers were thrown into the open carriages. That evening, however, K and her companions witnessed frightening scenes of brawling and street disturbances. Several shops belonging to Germans had their windows smashed and were looted. Familiar shops in the centre of Metz had been completely emptied of stock. General de Maud'huy had apparently sent troops to prevent further trouble. During the day K had already noticed 'l'animation des civils contre les allemands (sic.)'. Any Germans who took to the streets that evening were chased with cries of 'A bas les boches (sic.)!'. The next day, K returned once again to Metz and this time saw crowds of French, American, Italian, and British soldiers milling around the town. 'C'est autrement bien qu'il y a un mois quand on ne voyait que des boches (sic.)'.<sup>24</sup>

The signing of the armistice and the occupation of the region by French troops, therefore, had brought for K's family the opportunity to enjoy the lavish celebrations

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<sup>23</sup> Entry of 8 December 1918.

<sup>24</sup> K began to use the term *boche* despite her usually tolerant attitude towards Germans.



laid on by the incoming French military. They relished the chance to walk the streets of Metz, and converse freely and openly in French. However, it was not until the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference, when it was confirmed that Germany had accepted the punitive conditions imposed upon her by the Allies, that many were willing to believe that both the war and the German annexation of Alsace and Lorraine were over. On 23 June 1919, K wrote with heavy scepticism, shared by so many in the regions, 'On est à la joie partout, fait-on bien?... C'est ce qu'on saura plus tard.'

### *A new routine*

In August 1918, K appears to have found no irony in the pleasant image of her parents gathering mirabelles to make jam during the day, whilst at night they huddled, terrified, in their cramped bomb shelter in the garden, with bombs landing on nearby towns and villages where family and friends lived. Likewise, K is equally matter-of-fact about a visit from the German tax inspector on 9 September 1918, only weeks before the end of the war and the transfer of sovereignty over the regions. Food shortages, by then affecting the German army and not just civilians, meant that the family's grape harvest was poor, as so much had been stolen by hungry soldiers. The potato crop had to be brought in early in order to avoid a similar fate, and there was a rush to harvest the cabbage to prevent the underfed livestock from eating it first.

As the end of the war approached, the village of Peltre suffered, like so much of Europe, from a major epidemic of Spanish influenza which resulted in many civilian deaths. The severity of the epidemic meant the end of the war itself was almost eclipsed. The young and the old were particularly badly affected, and, from mid October, the school was closed in an effort to check the epidemic.

In fact, had it not been for the epidemic, it is likely the school would have remained open throughout the final stages of the war, and up to the armistice itself. Instead, it reopened at the end of November.<sup>25</sup> Also, part of the school was used initially to store French weapons and ammunition when the first troops arrived. However, very quickly, the children were able to return to their classes. With the same teachers (who were largely nuns from the local convent), classes resumed, but in a different language. There is no better illustration of how smoothly this transition operated than in G's *Deutsche Schrift* jotter, as figure 10 shows on the next page.<sup>26</sup> Her last exercise in German handwriting is dated 9 October 1918. This was followed, on the very next page, by her first exercise in French handwriting, entitled 'La Gaule et les Gaulois'. The text reads, 'La France se nommait autrefois la Gaule. Elle était couverte de forêts et de marais. Les Gaulois étaient des hommes grands et robustes'. G appears to have found writing in French easier than in German, which, at that stage, was still taught using the gothic style. Undoubtedly, this is because of her family's use of written and spoken French at home.

Not everyone among the Moselle's indigenous population was so fortunate. Emile Jochum, born in 1906 in St Avoild on the German side of the linguistic frontier, did not know any French in 1918. He attended school for a further 18 months after which his formal education in French ended.<sup>27</sup> Such was the experience of a great number of children and youths living in these regions, who found their education so

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<sup>25</sup> Deaths as a result of the epidemic continued well into January and February 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the *Bekanntmachungen* (public notices register) for St Avoild, 1 April 1916 to 5 December 1918 also illustrates the change in administration and the subsequent change in language. Prior to November 1918, most entries were in German. Only information which specifically had to reach the Francophone population was in French. After November 1918, though, all entries appeared in French but were followed by a German translation. *Archives municipales de St Avoild*, 1AL3.

<sup>27</sup> Emile Jochum was invited to write down his experiences from the armistice period for an exhibition organized by the municipal archives in St Avoild. A copy of his short account is held in the archives.





dramatically altered, and were left with a fluency in German which gave them few career prospects, and a smattering of French which was inadequate. Often, pupils who had been regarded as extremely promising under German annexation, found their hopes of further education dashed by their linguistic shortcomings. However, occasionally there were lighter moments. Emile Jochum recalled returning to school after the French had arrived in St. Avoird on Thursday 21 November 1918.

Et voilà qu'on nous gratifie d'un soldat haut comme trois  
pommes ne sachant pas l'allemand... et nous pas le  
français. Il a demandé nos noms. Voilà que Klein dit  
Fensterbrett [window ledge], Vigneron dit Goldspatz  
[golden sparrow], etc... Quand Monsieur Haas est venu  
voir si nous avions fait du progrès, le soldat appela  
Fensterbrett... et notre directeur est parti en riant. Le  
lendemain tout avait changé.

For children in the very early stages of their education, the new administration's *francisation* plans were more easily implemented, and propaganda was openly used as if it were a blunt instrument. In April 1919, K noted that large quantities of material had arrived at school for the children: postcards, jotters with patriotic covers, books, and pictures. The jotters, in contrast to their rather sober German equivalents, were brightly coloured with pictures of famous Alsatian or Lorrainer military heroes on the front, and texts entitled 'Les gloires militaires et civiles de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine' on the back. The campaign was indeed lavish and no doubt delighted the youngsters and amused any Francophone, Francophile parents. Likewise, numerous patriotic songs and poems were recited in schools and at



ceremonies, celebrating the defeat of Germany and the victory of France in the returned provinces. G kept copies of some of these and their words are reproduced in Appendix III.

A return to something resembling 'normality' for K was not possible until early 1919. The lengthy entries in her diary describing the final stages of the war, the armistice, the political void which followed, and then the celebrations and festivities marking the arrival of French troops, did not abate until well into 1919. In December 1918 she explained that life was too hectic to allow her to write every day so she would content herself with a brief résumé. It was not until February and March 1919 that life eventually returned to a calmer weekly routine. Wash days, digging and planting in the garden, visits to relatives in Metz and neighbouring villages, housework and cooking, duties associated with the church, all gradually resumed their normal significance. In these areas, little in K's daily routine had changed since before or during the war. However, subtle, as well as more obvious, changes to her life can be detected following the change in administration.

The most prominent of these changes is K's involvement with the women's branch of the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* (the LPF).<sup>28</sup> It appears her first contact with the league came in July 1919, when she attended a meeting organized at a friend's house. Here she heard a talk on the league, although there is no indication of what the talk was specifically about. Two weeks later, K, along with the ladies from the château in Peltre, collected subscriptions for the League. K comments that this went well and everyone was willing to join. The League was a right-wing Catholic

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<sup>28</sup> McMillan, James, 'Women, religion, and politics: the case of the Ligue Patriotique des Françaises', in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, Vol. 15, 1988, pp.355-364.

organisation, which had emerged as a result of the conflict between the church and state in the late nineteenth century, following the Dreyfus Affair. K's reasons for joining are likely to have been dictated by her family's Catholicism, rather than by the political agenda of the LPF, which included calls for women's suffrage. One of K's first responsibilities as a member was to make a collection for the *pays dévastés*. Such collections were made all over the regions immediately after the war, and the sums collected by villages and communities were often used as evidence of loyalty to France. K was pleased with their collection (350 francs), as the League was collecting only from women, and not from the military or from working men.

At regular intervals K, and other members, distributed the League's newspapers around the village. However, it was not until December 1920 that the League's activities began to take up more of K's time. A meeting of all the younger members was held on 12 December at the château in Peltre. They requested that a *conférence* (presumably a large meeting of all members from the area) be held by the League, which would be followed by the performance of a play. The idea was unanimously accepted, and the meeting was concluded once cakes and chocolates had been served (which many of the younger girls could not enjoy as they were so intimidated by their grand surroundings). Plays were decided upon, and rehearsals for 'Les sabots du diable' and 'Veuve la verdure' began a few days later. K hosted the rehearsals in the family's kitchen, as the school had no heating in the evenings. After two weeks of rehearsals, the plays were successfully performed in front of an all-female audience.

K's enjoyment of theatrical performances is obvious from her diary as was her increasing involvement with the League, which, she notes in January 1921, seemed to



be linked to the preparation and performance of plays (although K never took a leading part in any of them). In fact, K continued to distribute newspapers, and to attend meetings of the League over the following years, despite the diminishing interest and attendance by fellow members. In October 1923, she commented in her diary on the very poor attendance at a League meeting. At a further meeting in April 1924, she was the only one to attend. K had been an enthusiastic and loyal member of the League, which must have provided one of the few forums for more serious discussion outwith her family circle, as well as the opportunity to hear invited speakers.

A second, equally important change to K's everyday life involves the obvious question of language. Before the outbreak of war in 1914, the policy of Germanisation had succeeded in reducing the overall number of French speakers in the Moselle, but had not succeeded in preventing Francophone parents teaching French to their children. K's family is a perfect example of this. At home, they spoke only French. However, they were bilingual and able to conduct all other affairs in German. Occasionally, in her diary, K uses German terms where she does not know the French equivalent, such as *Unterstand* (bomb shelter) and *Kreisdirektion* (regional administration). During the war, use of the French language, both spoken and written, was strictly prohibited. In the case of K's family, there was the added pressure of accommodating German officers billeted on their house, which meant they could not even be overheard using French. Nonetheless, K continued to write her diary in French, which, if it had been found, could have created serious repercussions for the family. Yet, K expressed only mild irritation with these officers in the very last days of the war. Her demeanour was otherwise correct and polite. Likewise, it was only once the war had ended that she first used the term *boche* to refer to Germans. Only two

and a half weeks before, she had attended the funeral of a German soldier who had died of his wounds in the convent.<sup>29</sup> As the German soldiers withdrew from the region, K had expressed pity for the wounded who struggled behind. And during the celebrations to mark the entry of French troops to the region, she was clearly taken aback by the violence she witnessed in Metz against Germans. Her use of the term *boche* is perhaps indicative of the more general need among the indigenous population, and mimicked by K, to distinguish themselves from the Germans, as well as to express their pro-French sentiment. Her use of the term does not necessarily, therefore, reflect her own antipathy for the German people.

On 31 January 1920, an Alsatian festival was held in Rombas which K attended. She thoroughly enjoyed the musical entertainment, as well as a play which was performed entirely in Alsatian. Despite a good knowledge of both German and French, there were still a few words she did not entirely understand. Two years later, whilst visiting a cousin in Alsace, she commented, 'C'est assez difficile de comprendre le patois allemand des indigènes'.<sup>30</sup> Again, this emphasizes the linguistic gulf that existed between *Mosellans* and Alsatians at that time. As she had set herself apart from the incoming French officers, billeted on the family's house, she also set herself apart from the Alsatian *indigènes*. However, an equally vast gulf existed between those who lived to the south of the linguistic frontier in the Moselle itself, and those who lived to the north. Once, during a visit to Boulay, K attempted firstly to communicate with the local people in German, then in French. However, it seems they were unwilling to trust her in either language.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Entry of 13 October 1918.

<sup>30</sup> Entry of 19 May 1922.

<sup>31</sup> This was recounted to the author by G at a meeting on 22 April 1998.



*Current affairs*

Throughout her diary, K commented regularly upon local, regional, and international issues, occasionally allowing her opinions to spill onto the page. Her sceptical treatment of rumours during the final stages of the war meant that she was seldom misled. She also showed a great enthusiasm to learn about events elsewhere. Young, male friends and relatives who had been enlisted to the German army and sent to Russia to fight, were a source of information and stories. In early December 1918, the family had a visit from 'un vrai français en uniforme boche'. Such visitors were clearly relished by K and her family, as were the French officers they accommodated.

K paid particular attention to local events, such as the almost immediate changes made to the local council in Peltre, and the drawing up of lists of suitable candidates to replace those thrown out. She even became quite excited about the first elections to the national assembly in November 1919. And why not? These were exciting times. Yet she, like all women in France in 1919, could not vote. Had the region still been part of Germany, the reverse would have been the case. Still, K did not brood on this point. Perhaps knowledge of her father's work, and his opportunities to participate in local, regional, and national politics, were sufficient for the time being.

The railway line which serves Peltre, runs through the centre of the village and the station is only a short walk from the family's house. Almost every day, one or more members of the family made a journey by rail, usually to Metz. K recorded in her diary delays to trains, people she had met on the train that day, and a multitude of petty details concerning rail travel. As a result, K followed with a keen interest strikes

affecting trains. In fact, the reliability of the train services provide an excellent social and political gauge for integration of the regions. In September 1920, she acknowledged Millerand's rise to President of the Republic. In March 1921, she noted that her father was extremely busy with the *grand recensement*, the first since the region had been returned to France. In January and February 1923, she mentioned strikes followed by the occupation by French troops of the Ruhr. In March 1925, she recorded the death of President Ebert in Germany. And later that year, she gave a lengthy description of how a strike by 'Bolsheviks' in Rombas, in protest against the war in Morocco, had failed. Yet, what is interesting about K's awareness of these issues is that they concern both France and Germany. Happy though she and her family were to disassociate themselves from German rule, they were still aware of their vulnerability on the new and very weak north-eastern frontier bordering Germany.

Clearly, much of K's knowledge of current affairs was derived from her father. His work and his contact with the local council and with teachers' organisations, meant that he was well informed about a wide range of issues. More than likely, the family read newspapers on a regular basis. But there were also the numerous visits to relatives and friends in Metz, as well as around the region. Family and church matters were important, but K's awareness of what was going on in the world around her is not consistent with someone who indulged purely in idle gossip. There is evidence of an earnest desire to keep abreast with issues which influenced her life and that of her family, as well as the future of her region and country.

Despite this, any mention of the denunciation and expulsion of Germans from the Moselle region following the arrival of the French occupying forces, of the mass repatriation of German civil servants, of the difficulties experienced by members of the



clergy caught on the wrong side of French patriotism, is most obviously absent from the pages of K's diary. She made no mention of the trainloads of *expulsés*, of the sale of sequestered furniture, property, and even clothes advertised in the local newspapers on a daily basis, or of the efforts of the authorities to limit the number of letters of denunciation arriving at the office of the *commissaire général* in Metz. All of the above was common knowledge in the regions at the time. It would have been obvious simply from the newspapers, but even more evident for someone who visited the station in Metz in a regular basis. In order to witness every trainload of *expulsés* and *rapatriés*, large crowds gathered to bid them farewell. The platform was carefully cordoned off, the military and police presence was greater than usual. Clearly, it would have been almost impossible for K to have remained unaware of what was happening, especially in view of her awareness of current affairs in other areas. Why, then, did K never mention such matters? Were she and her family simply burying their heads in the sand? Or is the answer more sinister than that? Did they actually play their own part in chasing the German immigrants from the Moselle region? From what can be seen of K's family through the pages of her diary, none of these scenarios is at all likely.

Firstly, the family's direct contact with Germans was relatively rare, confined to officers billeted on the house. Otherwise, few Germans had moved to the village of Peltre during annexation. After the war, therefore, the family is unlikely to have had any first hand experience of the expulsion of German families. Secondly, what exactly could K have said in response to the expulsions, in view of the fact that the diary was written primarily to remember family events? Thirdly, the post-war period and the behaviour of the indigenous population must be seen in the context of the horrors of war, and of the brutality of Germany's martial law. Denunciations, tribunals, and the

mass departures of German immigrants did not suddenly appear out of nowhere.

Bitterness and vengeance were not new, or unexpected, emotions in the aftermath of war. Likewise, it was easy to justify the new order, with *indigènes* for once seemingly at the top, and Germans below. Perhaps there was even a feeling of inevitability about the expulsions. Germans had to be dealt with one way or another. Finally, what could K's family have said or done to counter the mistreatment of Germans? Whilst they might not have agreed with the extreme behaviour of some of their fellow *indigènes*, neither were they in a position to pass judgement or to criticize them. To do so would so easily have been interpreted as unpatriotic, pro-*Boche* behaviour and would have brought with it the threat of *commissions de triage*. And, like so many who had suffered their own personal tragedies during the war, the need to 'get on with their lives' was an over-riding priority. Showing concern or moral outrage at the fate of Germans living in the region would simply have involved them in a prolonged and emotional battle, which they could well do without.

### *The healing process*

The months and years which followed the armistice were punctuated with celebrations, memorial services, and official visits by French dignitaries. The public relations machinery of the new administration, initially in the form of the *service de la propagande*, regularly rolled into action giving the reintegrated population the opportunity both to celebrate its return to *la mère patrie* and to learn about its new sovereign power.<sup>32</sup> Propaganda techniques employed include the use of the cinema.

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<sup>32</sup> In the Moselle, a *service de propagande* was created in 1919 and was directed by the head of the cabinet of the *commissaire de la République en Moselle*, Jacques Feschotte. In April 1919, this *service* was attached directly to the cabinet of the *commissariat général* in Strasbourg. Its initial aims were to survey the press and co-ordinate anti-German propaganda, but it soon took on a more positive



On 25 February 1921, K notes that teachers from neighbouring villages came to watch a film on the war, and on areas devastated by the fighting. There was a good turn-out for this event, typical of those organized by the *Service de la propagande*. Many other events and excursions were organized, including visits to battlefields (notably Verdun), to the *pays dévastés*, and even to holiday camps in the rest of France. K's family visited the areas around Nomeny, Rocourt and Lemenil in the Meurthe-et-Moselle department on 1 August 1920. 'C'est vraiment pitié de voir tout ce pays là, ... il ne reste rien d'avant guerre, tous les logements sont refaits provisoirement en planches: l'église, palais de justice, caisse d'épargne, tout'.<sup>33</sup>

From the earliest stage of its return to France, the region embarked upon a series of celebrations as well as commemorations. On 22 December 1918, K attended a *Te Deum*, held to commemorate the end of hostilities and, above all, to thank God for the region's return to French nationality. K notes that this was a most beautiful occasion (except that, to her disgust, the collection was made by 'la plus enragée coureuse de boches pendant toute la guerre...'). On 22 May 1919, the schools were given a day's holiday in honour of a visit by the *commissaire général*, Alexandre Millerand.<sup>34</sup> And on 28 June 1919, with the signing of the Peace Treaty in Paris, the streets were decorated with *tricolores*. 'La gare est toute garnie de verdure et de

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approach to influencing and educating the local populations in the French way of life. See ADM, 3 Tp 174-182.

<sup>33</sup> Even around Peltre as late as June 1921, debris from the war had not been properly cleared. Around lunch time on 29 June, the family heard explosions from the nearby woods. Fire, caused by the drought conditions, had spread to a munitions dump and had set bombs off. It took many years before the countryside was made safe. Four years later, K remarked that in the woods near Peltre, what was called locally *la route de guerre*, was marked by bomb craters and burnt out cars. Some of these craters can still be found today.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Poincaré and his wife paid the region a visit on 23 August 1919, which coincided with a boat festival on the Moselle river, and in November of that year, K visited a display of gifts in Metz offered to Foch, Mangin, and Pétain by the citizens of the Moselle.

drapeaux et habitée (manned) des boches...'. Whilst the Peace Treaty marked definitively the end of German rule in the regions, those of German origin were still heavily represented in certain sectors of the civil service, notably the railways.

In July 1919, for the first time ever, the inhabitants of Alsace and the Moselle celebrated the national holiday marking the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. As a national holiday, Bastille Day on 14 July had only been celebrated in France since 1880, and so no one among the indigenous population was familiar with its traditions, and in some cases, with its significance. In fact, a 'guide' was published for teachers, mayors, organizers of festivities explaining how to celebrate 'La Fête du 14 Juillet'. See figure 11 below.<sup>35</sup>

Vient de paraître :  
« LA FÊTE DU 14 JUILLET »

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« *La Fête du 14 Juillet* », par *Paul Charpentier, Instituteur à Metz, Délégué de la Société nationale des Conférences populaires*, est un petit livre mis à la portée de tous : il est ~~le~~ guide précieux pour Conférenciers, Instituteurs. Maires, appelés à prendre la parole le jour de notre grande Fête Nationale ou chargés de l'élaboration de son programme.

14 Juillet 1789 — 14 Juillet 1790 — 14 Juillet 1919 — *Le Drapeau tricolore* — « *La Marseillaise* » — telles sont les diverses parties de cet ouvrage fort intéressant, qui contient en outre un choix des plus judicieux de *lectures* et de *poésies* empruntées à nos grands historiens ou à nos meilleurs poètes et toute une série de *chants patriotiques* des mieux sélectionnés

A la fin de ce recueil qui renferme toute une véritable documentation pour conférences et discours, l'on trouve encore les chapitres suivants : *Sujets à traiter* — *La Fête Nationale à la Ville et au Village* — enfin un *Programme de Fête scolaire*.

Le meilleur accueil sera sûrement réservé à ce livre dont le besoin se faisait sentir et que chacun voudra posséder dans sa bibliothèque

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Prière d'insérer en Bibliographie.

Figure 11: Publicity for a new publication on how to celebrate 14 July.

<sup>35</sup> ADM, 3 Tp 181.



On 13 July, K and her family attended a series of short plays performed in honour of the celebrations and later, with G, participated in a torchlit procession through Peltre organized by the military (Alsace and the Moselle were still technically under military occupation) and civilian authorities. The next day, a children's festival was held in the school, and in the evening they went to Metz to watch a magnificent fireworks display, marred only by the rain. Newspapers issued special editions to mark the occasion, commemorative posters were put up around the towns and villages and souvenirs went on sale. K clearly enjoyed these festivities. She enjoyed seeing Metz adorned in *tricolore* flags and decorations, and the festive occasions which brought a break from the daily routine of household chores and manual work in the garden or in the family's fields. Clearly, she liked learning about France, and experiencing for herself all the things her family had told her about *la mère patrie* during the first 25 years of her life.

The new French administration lost no time in laying on patriotic events and official visits for the indigenous populations. Many involved elaborate ceremonies, heavily steeped in symbolism of the reattachment of Alsace and the Moselle to France. They also involved the more serious task of commemorating the war-dead of 1870 whom, it was felt, France had not yet been able to honour. On 24 June 1920, K attended an open-air mass near Nancy celebrated by Monsignor Pelt, the Bishop of Metz, followed by a procession led by Maurice Barrès who later gave a speech. The flags of Metz and Strasbourg were carried by Lorrainer and Alsatian girls in traditional costume and the ceremony ended with the replacement of the cross of Lorraine which had been removed in 1870. On a more local level, a *Grande Fête du Souvenir Français* was held in Peltre to commemorate the soldiers who had fought in the

Franco-Prussian war of 1870. A service was held in the village cemetery and a speech was made by Jean-Pierre Jean<sup>36</sup>. Difficulties arose with the commemoration of the region's war dead as so many indigenous soldiers during the First World War had fought in the German army.<sup>37</sup> Both iconography and the dedication had to be suitably adjusted, in order not to cause unnecessary offence to families such as K's, who mourned the death of a son and brother killed in the fighting against their beloved France through no fault of their own. The problem was resolved in Peltre, as it was in so many communes, by erecting a monument engraved with the words 'A nos Morts' instead of the more common 'aux enfants de ... morts pour la France' to be found in the 'interior'. In the graveyard in Peltre, the *Souvenir Français* erected a monument in 1922, engraved unambiguously with the words, 'Aux soldats Français tombés à Peltre en 1870'.

It was not until November 1922 that K mentioned any specific celebrations to mark the anniversary of the signing of the armistice. That year, there were great festivities in Metz and all over the region. Workers were given a holiday and there was a ball held in Metz which K attended and which went on all night. What can be interpreted from K's diary, is that even amidst the routine of everyday life in the aftermath of war and prolonged rationing, as well as economic uncertainty created by integration, such festivities and 'high days' brought a rare chance for enjoyment and relaxation. The demographic rupture suffered by Metz and other towns around the Moselle region, had left the morale of the city deeply affected. Recovery from the inevitable social, economic, and political problems would take time. If K's experience

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<sup>36</sup> J.-P. Jean was the *administrateur* and *Délégué général* of the *Souvenir Français*, and author of *Le Livre D'Or du Souvenir Français*, published in Metz in 1929.

<sup>37</sup> Kidd, 'War, Memory and Commemoration', in Evans, Martin, and Lunn, Ken, eds., *War and Memory in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Oxford, 1997.



is at all representative, the celebrations, ceremonies, and commemorations were a necessary part of the healing and recovery process. K and her family had, after all, suffered the terrible loss of a brother and son as a result of the war. He had been killed fighting against the French whose victory his family now celebrated. So, these celebrations were not always imposed upon the population by the *service de la propagande*, intent on feeding the population neat packages of easily digested French patriotism. They brought a welcome and necessary break from the hardships of the integration process, and provided a chance to begin unravelling the inevitable confusion created by wartime and pre-war traumas.

### *A lesson in history*

Espérons qu'après deux grandes guerres nous allons  
continuer à pouvoir vivre en paix. L'histoire est une  
succession de jours bons et mauvais pour tous les pays  
jusqu'à ce que les nations aient compris que la guerre  
n'arrange rien et est la ruine de tous.<sup>38</sup>

G's sadness and regret at the extent and impact of war reflects her own suffering as much as that of others whose regions have become battlegrounds for international struggles. The sisters' lives were deeply affected by the Franco-Prussian war, as well as the First and Second World Wars. Despite the absence of conflict between France and Germany for the last 40 years, the Moselle region and its population remain scarred by these wars. Questions of loyalty which arose with each annexation, each war, and each subsequent reintegration, have forced individuals to question their trust in their friends, neighbours, and even family, to keep innermost feelings and their true

sentiment to themselves. G describes the Moselle's population as *méfiant*, distrustful and suspicious of each other.<sup>39</sup> Even events surrounding the reattachment of the region to France in 1918 remain as sensitive now as they were then. Perhaps this is why K does not detail the experience of Germans living in the region. Perhaps the need for *méfiance* was already established even as she wrote the entries in her diary 80 years ago. Despite what is clearly missing from K's diary, it remains one of the very few written documents from the period to trace the daily existence of members of its population. But K only paints part of the picture. What of those who, unlike K and her family, were unable to rejoice at the turn of events in October and November 1918? What was it like to live in a region and no longer find security in the administration, political institutions, or police force?

It was the wish of many in the French administration, as well as extreme Francophiles within the population, that those who had collaborated with the Germans during annexation and war, should be made to suffer the consequences of their actions following integration. As detailed in the previous chapter, the broad impact of this was a witch hunt, which resulted in the expulsion and repatriation of thousands of Germans and 'unreliables'. Those who managed to remain, were reduced to the status of second class citizens, something the indigenous population had complained about throughout annexation and the war. For example, an advert placed in the *Courrier de Metz* newspaper in July 1919, by a men's clothing supplier, stated, 'Alsaciens et Lorrains de Coeur. Pour vous prouver notre fraternité et notre solidarité nous voulons vous éviter l'ennui de vous fournir encore dans les maisons d'ennemis.' An *avis* dated 10 December 1918 stated, 'Il est interdit de parler Allemand (sic.) en public après 22

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<sup>38</sup> From a letter to the author of 14 June 1998 from G.

<sup>39</sup> From a meeting with G on 22 April 1998.



heures. Les Allemands ne sont pas obligés par nous de saluer les officiers, mais ils doivent saluer nos drapeaux.’<sup>40</sup> The curfew was lifted by General de Maud’huy on 7 August 1919, as it was recognized that the German population had been greatly reduced, but, more importantly, because of ‘la difficulté éprouvée par un grand nombre d’Alsaciens et de Lorrains de langue allemande à s’exprimer en Français’.<sup>41</sup> The problems which the curfew had caused the police were highlighted in a report, dated 29 July 1919, written by the *commissaire spécial* in Metz. Three individuals had been arrested for speaking in German after 10 pm, when it was discovered that all three were *indigènes*. A fight had broken out after one of the three had been ‘traité de Boches’ by a gendarme.

Language repeatedly created difficulties between the indigenous population and the new authorities to the north of the linguistic frontier in the region. In August 1920, the mayor of Sarreguemines wrote that despite several attempts, he had been unsuccessful in persuading shopkeepers in the town to put all signs in French rather than German. However, he went on, in view of the fact that Sarreguemines was a *ville frontière*, it was necessary to use both languages. In some cases, he concluded, the use of German was no longer merely informative for the public, but a declaration in itself. In Metz and Strasbourg, on the other hand, many chemists tried to resolve the problem by erecting signs in multiple languages, including English and Italian. Many complaints were made by Germanophone *indigènes* to the authorities about their mistreatment. An anonymous letter to the *commissaire* in Metz of 23 July 1923 described how a Lorrainer soldier from Sarreguemines had been punished following an

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<sup>40</sup> ADM, 301 M 69.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

altercation in which another had called him a 'boche'.<sup>42</sup> The soldier listed other grievances including the fact that 'French' troops (meaning presumably Francophone troops) were granted leave, whereas the Germanophone Alsatians and Lorrainers were not.

As for German immigrants who remained in the region, they were continuously regarded with suspicion. In a report by the *Administrateur* in Château-Salins, the author conceded that 'les Allemands sont corrects mais rien de plus'. He went on to state that the population suspected the German employees of sabotaging the postal and telegraph services, which had been poor since the end of the war. Such suspicions were widespread, and, in one case, resulted in an incident at the station in Hagondange.<sup>43</sup> A train carrying a group of local delegates was so badly delayed that they were forced to wait until the next day for their connecting train. So incensed was one of the delegates, that he grabbed the German-style hat of one of the station employees and threw it to the ground, stating that, if the train had been coming from Berlin rather than Metz, no such problem would have occurred. As far as the employee's hat was concerned, the delegate declared, he should not be wearing one in the German style. The employee, despite the intensity of insults heaped upon him, made no complaint. Clearly, such happenstance was commonplace.

An extract from a letter, written by a Madame Pelt of Forbach, illustrates the prejudice which formed amongst some members of the indigenous population about the continuing presence of Germans in the region.<sup>44</sup> She complained the railways were run entirely by Germans whose mission it was to impede the smooth running of the

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<sup>42</sup> ADM, 26 Z 46.

<sup>43</sup> ADM, 301 M 69. Report of 21 January 1920.

<sup>44</sup> ADM, 301 M 69. Extract of 7 February 1919.



trains. She stated, 'ces Allemands qui ont gardé leurs places, sont brutaux avec les Lorrains qu'ils ont sur leurs ordres.' Furthermore, Germans, she claimed, were inciting Lorrainer employees to strike. She asked, 'Pourquoi sommes-nous Français puisque des Allemands nous commandent?'. Germans were suspected of spreading anti-French propaganda, of importing cocaine to the region through Forbach, and even of supplying cheap German pornographic literature to booksellers in the region.<sup>45</sup>

In some areas, almost a year after the region's return to France, Germans still outnumbered the indigenous population. In the *arrondissement* of Thionville Ouest, the *administrateur* complained that he did not have the necessary staff to control the region.<sup>46</sup> He had no chief of police in a region where there were numerous revolutionary elements. Out of a population of nearly 80,000, only 20,000 were *lorrain*. The rest were Germans or other foreigners.<sup>47</sup> Yet, reports with evidence of Germans actually causing disturbances, or of committing the crimes so many accused them of, are rare. On the contrary, several reports indicate that many employers considered the German worker as 'discipliné, parfois spécialisé, qui leur donne satisfaction'.<sup>48</sup> That particular statement was made by the chief of police in Metz. The *sous-préfet* of Metz-Campagne also commented that Germans working in industry in the area were largely specialists, who would be difficult to replace. Equally, German agricultural workers had generally been with their employers for some time, 'auxquels ils donnent toute satisfaction'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> PRO, FO 371/8259. Report of 22 March 1922 from Lord Hardinge in Paris, p.36.

<sup>46</sup> ADM, 301 M 74. Letter of 15 October 1919.

<sup>47</sup> In 1923, the total number of Germans resident in the Moselle *département* was 33,449. There were 24,092 Italians, 12,311 Poles, and 11,418 Luxembourgers.

<sup>48</sup> ADM, 310 M 50. Report to the *commissaire central* in Metz of 14 June 1925.

<sup>49</sup> ADM, 310 M 50. Report to the Prefect of the Moselle of 4 July 1925.

The general picture which emerges from the documentation shows that, in many cases, it was not the remaining German population which was the main source of trouble in the Moselle, but Alsatians working in the region. A report concerning incidents in Hagondange, in October 1919, concluded that there was, 'un mouvement nettement anti-français qui se manifeste parmi les ouvriers d'usine d'origine alsacienne [sic.]'.<sup>50</sup> A group of Alsatian workers had apparently attacked two French soldiers, who had entered a café in Hagondange, and asked for a drink in French. The Alsatians responded, 'Ici on ne cause pas Français (sic.). Voilà les soldats français. Il faut tous les tuer.' Another report painted a similar picture stating,

La plupart des allemands [sic.] se montreraient en général calmes et corrects, ne demandant qu'à gagner tranquillement leur vie, les alsaciens [sic.] toujours en groupes, provoquent des rixes et font du tapage au café, où ils chantent des chansons patriotiques allemandes, ce qui semblerait plutôt être par esprit de contradiction que par patriotisme allemand.<sup>51</sup>

Alsatians working in Hayange were also the subject of reports as a result of their rowdy behaviour, and the pleasure they took in singing loudly in German, as well as their local dialect, all of which clearly irritated the authorities and the Moselle's indigenous population. Even those who spoke German were often treated as 'Boche' by the *Français de l'intérieur*.

The French authorities were left with an awkward situation which was not what they had anticipated in the regions. Their initial policy of banning the use of

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<sup>50</sup> ADM, 301 M 69. Report of 7 October 1919.

<sup>51</sup> ADM, 301 M 69. Report by the *commissaire spécial* for Thionville of 30 August 1919.



German in public had back-fired, as it penalized many among the indigenous population who were not Francophone or bilingual. Where they had anticipated trouble and unrest from Germans, there had been little. Instead, it was Alsatian *particularistes* who spent their time attempting, and usually succeeding, in upsetting the French soldiers and authorities. Even some members of the Francophone population expressed disquiet at the treatment of *indigènes* by the incoming French. One letter, although not representative of all opinion in the region, stated that despite the author's acceptance that everyone had been delighted when the Germans departed, 'à la police on est encore traité pire qu'en temps des boches'.<sup>52</sup> The letter was signed 'un vieux soldat de 1870'.

### *Concluding remarks*

During a trip to Lourdes with her mother in 1922, K commented in a letter to friends on how they were received at the Hôtel de la Ville de Metz et de Strasbourg. Expecting to be properly welcomed at a hotel with such a name, K and her mother were deeply disappointed when they were given poor service and an unsuitable room. 'Nous n'avons vraiment pas été reçues comme des Lorrains'.<sup>53</sup> This was K's first visit into France, beyond Lorraine. How difficult it must have been for the experience to live up to her expectations. K, just like the anonymous and aged war veteran above, who politely apologized in his letter to the new administration for complaining, had expectations of what integration should mean and the manner in which it should take place. However, the process of integration was to be longer and more complicated than they, or the French authorities, could have anticipated. The transfer of

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<sup>52</sup> ADM, 304 M 1. Letter of 28 May 1919.

<sup>53</sup> This letter of 9 September 1922, written by K, was returned to her by the addressee.

sovereignty gave a new set of people the upper hand. The Germans were forced to accept humbly second class status, and to endure the same treatment many of their fellow countrymen had dealt to the region's *indigènes* during the war. In turn, the *indigènes* had to accept that recognition of their full French status was reliant on their ability to speak French, as much as on the granting of French citizenship by the Treaty of Versailles.



### *Summary*

The early period of transition from war to peace in the Moselle was, in the case of K's Francophone, Francophile family, a time for celebration, enjoyment, and relaxation. K's diary records the numerous official visits, 'liberation' parades, and torchlit processions, as well as more sombre commemoration ceremonies performed by the *Souvenir Français*, which marked the early weeks and months of French rule in the regions. Through the involvement of K's father in municipal affairs, the family were kept up to date on various aspects of the integration process. However, attention was soon turned to the more mundane aspects of everyday life: visits from friends and relatives, trips to Metz for shopping and appointments, and chores in the house and garden. There is little mention in K's diary of the fate of the thousands of Germans, *expulsés* and *rapatriés*, and their treatment by the authorities and by certain sections of the indigenous population. On the one hand, this absence of comment is surprising in view of the number of departures made from Metz station, and in view of the process of denunciations and sequestration of property. On the other hand, the diary was not written in order to record such events, or to pass judgement on a process which may have seemed inevitable in the circumstances. In any case, K's experiences in the aftermath of war were unlike those of *indigènes* to the north of the linguistic frontier. There, problems which arose because of language again feature prominently in police reports from around the region. Yet, more often than not it was Alsatians, rather than *Mosellans* or Germans, who were guilty of causing unrest and disturbing the peace. Once again, the problems can often be traced back to the conflicting expectations of *indigènes* and *Français de l'intérieur*.

## Chapter VII

### From Miracle to *Malaise*: the Economy

En 1914, le gigantisme règne en Lorraine. Des usines immenses couvrent les vallées. On parle de millions de tonnes de minerai extrait du sous-sol, de réserves pour cent ans. [...] De l'acier Thomas jaillissant du convertisseur en milliers d'étincelles illuminant le ciel lorrain. Spectacle grandiose, cascades de lumière, flots d'or et de miel...<sup>1</sup>

These spectacular images, conjured up by François Baudin, of Lorraine's magnificent factories, vast mine fields, and seemingly endless mineral resources in no way exaggerate the region's industrial potential on the eve of the Great War. The remarkable *essor* (development) of Europe's richest industrial zone which stretched from the Ruhr, through the Saarland, to Luxembourg, Lorraine and Belgium, had taken place, according to Baudin, thanks to exceptional economic conditions. Such prosperity led to the take-off of modern agricultural practices, the release of manpower from rural employment, and the mobilisation of an international workforce from the German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, France, Belgium, Luxembourg,

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<sup>1</sup> Baudin, *Histoire économique et sociale. Vol. II L'essor*, p.277. Baudin's three volume study of Lorraine's economic and social history deals with the whole of Lorraine. However, the rapid expansion of mining and industrial activity affected largely the Meurthe-et-Moselle (the *arrondissements* of Briey and Longwy) and the Moselle departments.



Italy, and beyond.<sup>2</sup> However, war, and its outcome, were to put the brakes on Europe's success story, in particular where the Moselle was concerned.

During the war, French territory occupied by German forces included the *arrondissement* of Briey, encompassing numerous iron ore mines and iron and steel factories which were sequestered and exploited by the German occupiers during most of the conflict. However, in the final stages of the war, as a German defeat looked certain, they removed all the tools, machines, and supplies they could before systematically destroying what remained, sabotaging the region's industrial and mining production as best they could.<sup>3</sup> In the Moselle, all mines and industry belonging to French owners were also sequestered by the German government, and run by German companies.<sup>4</sup> The armistice reversed this, returning sequestered property to its rightful owners. Factories, mines and businesses which had been owned by German companies or individuals prior to the war, were run by the French state through the *Service des liquidations et séquestrations d'Alsace et de Lorraine* until they were sold off to new, non-German owners. Unlike the Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Moselle escaped any major physical damage to its industrial assets. It was only in the final stages of the war that allied aeroplanes were sent to bomb the region. For the rest of the war, however, the French had left industry and mining largely intact, as it had been their intention from the earliest stages of the war to regain sovereignty of the regions.

In the days which followed the armistice, the scene which greeted the incoming French army as it arrived in what had been occupied territory in the Meurthe-et-Moselle, was one of devastation. 'Quant aux usines, à ces grandes aciéries qui étaient

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Galloro, Piero-Dominique, *La main-d'oeuvre des usines sidérurgiques de Lorraine, 1880-1939*, unpublished PhD thesis, Metz, 1996, p.294.

<sup>4</sup> Although *indigènes* were legally German, during the war they were set apart from German immigrants.

l'honneur et la gloire de la France de l'Est, on peut dire qu'elles n'existent plus.'<sup>5</sup> The Moselle's mines and industry, on the other hand, remained intact. Nevertheless, production was halted at the end of the war, due to the activities of the revolutionary soldiers' and workers' councils, and the confusion which accompanied the armistice in the provinces. Initially, therefore, the task of rebuilding the Meurthe-et-Moselle's factories and restoring access to its mines, was far greater than the task of restoring the Moselle's industrial productivity. Before long, grumblings from the local populations in Briey and Longwy could be heard about the length of time it was taking to restore communications in the region, whilst comparisons with Alsace and the Moselle, whose communication systems gave the appearance of running relatively smoothly during the days following the entry of French troops, only increased the sense of dissatisfaction.<sup>6</sup> However, such mutterings of discontent, criticising a perceived favouritism shown to the newly returned provinces, merely foreshadowed far more vociferous complaints from Nancy, regarding the re-entry of Strasbourg and Metz to the competition for the title *capitale de l'est* which had economic, as well as social, consequences for the Meurthe-et-Moselle.

In any case, such complaints were premature. Although industry and mining in the Meurthe-et-Moselle required, in most cases, re-building from scratch, this provided the perfect window of opportunity for the modernisation of machinery and methods. Once construction was complete, the region's progress was steady and sustained, as pre-war supply routes resumed and former markets reopened. Yet, the Moselle's failure to follow the Meurthe-et-Moselle's lead was not simply due to different circumstances, or to teething troubles with new suppliers and markets. Prolonged

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Lebrun, Minister for the Liberated Regions, quoted from an interview in *Le Temps*, cited in Bonnet, *L'Homme du fer*, p.193.



stagnation, from which the Moselle's economy suffered throughout most of the 1920s, was due to a complex web of factors, circumstances, and missed opportunities on regional, national, and international levels. This was in stark contrast to a decade of comparative success and expansion, not just in the Meurthe-et-Moselle, but in the rest of France, which followed the example of the United States by increasing industrial output and improving general prosperity. With the exception of the crisis period of 1920 to 1921, and the instability of the franc between autumn 1926 and spring 1927, France was able to raise its industrial output from an index of 100 in 1913 to 140 by 1929.<sup>7</sup> Yet this success story was not geographically uniform, and the Moselle, despite its obvious potential at the end of the war, was not in a position to contribute to French prosperity. This chapter will examine the reasons behind this economic paradox, which took the region's economy from pre-war miracle to post-war *malaise*, and which led Claude Precheur to conclude that upon the region's return to *la mère patrie*, 'la Moselle fut sacrifiée'.<sup>8</sup>

### *Liquidation of industry*

In 1925, a lengthy publication appeared under the title *Séquestres et liquidations des biens allemands en Alsace et Lorraine*. Its author, Anatole Périet, was the *Directeur du service des liquidations d'Alsace et de Lorraine* and he endeavoured, in his publication, to set out the methods and reasons behind the sequestration and liquidation of German property in the returned regions.<sup>9</sup> Liquidation affected primarily mines, industry, and businesses owned by German or enemy subjects prior to and

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<sup>6</sup> Galloro, *La main-d'oeuvre des usines sidérurgiques*, p.295.

<sup>7</sup> Becker and Berstein, *Victoire et Frustrations*, p.314.

<sup>8</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.241.

<sup>9</sup> Périet, *Séquestres et liquidations des biens allemands en Alsace et Lorraine*, Paris, 1925, pp.1-5.

during the war. Private property and personal belongings were also sequestered and sold off during the years which followed, and bank accounts were frozen and later liquidated. Périer argued that justification for this whole process would be based entirely upon German behaviour during the 1914-18 war. At the Hague conference in 1907, attempts had been made to protect ordinary citizens during times of war. These included preventing occupying powers from laying claim to private capital or industry, from destroying or seizing privately owned property, unless this was necessitated by war, a move which sought to control looting and plundering. Wars, therefore, were to be between armies, not peoples. During the first World War, though, Germany's seizure of industrial and mining interests in the occupied territory, notably in the Meurthe-et-Moselle department, its subsequent removal of all machines, tools, and supplies, and finally its destruction of what remained, was in direct contradiction of the Hague agreement. For this reason, at the end of the war, the French Government proceeded with two *arrêtés* implementing the sequestration and liquidation of all German property in Alsace and the Moselle.

The *arrêté* of 30 November 1918 stated, firstly, that all commercial relations within Alsace and the Moselle would operate freely with the exception of transactions involving enemy subjects. The new administration reserved the right to take any necessary measures against such enemy subjects and their property in the interests of public order. This *arrêté* also stated that all commercial activity across the regions' borders to enemy or neutral territory was prohibited. It was in this *arrêté* that the sequestration of German property within the regions was envisaged. The second *arrêté* of 17 April 1919, ordered the liquidation of all sequestered property belonging to Germans. The German government later objected that France had been too hasty in proceeding with the sale of German property in the regions, claiming that this should



not have been carried out until the final ratification of the peace treaty. Périér's account defends French actions, stating, firstly, that sequestrations had occurred in response to German war-time sequestrations, and secondly that, in any case, the armistice had already pronounced the *désannexion* of the provinces, which gave France the right to act as they pleased as the new sovereign. However, the use of the phrase 'in the interests of public order' in the first of the *arrêtés* is a clear sign that the French needed to cover their backs. *Désannexion* was by no means written in stone by the armistice. This, coupled with what could be interpreted as a tit for tat response to Germany's war-time sequestrations, could have left the French occupiers of the provinces in a most precarious position, had anyone chosen to examine the legality of their actions. They therefore ensured that they could at least claim to be acting in the interests of 'public order', which was the only real power granted to any occupying force pending peace negotiations. In the end, though, German complaints fell upon deaf ears, as the Treaty of Versailles granted France the desired *désannexion* of the provinces, back-dating it to the armistice itself, and the topic of sequestrations and liquidations merged neatly with the entire process of 'reintegration'.<sup>10</sup>

The effective trade embargo between the provinces and Germany, created by the first of the *arrêtés*, was to have an immediate and damaging effect on the economy of the region. Indeed, a process of assimilating the Moselle's economy with that of its new sovereign had been anticipated and planned for during the war.<sup>11</sup> However, this would take time. For 47 years, the Moselle's economy had, almost exclusively, been supplied by, and had sold to, German markets. Although the armistice agreement, as well as the two *arrêtés*, had included clauses which allowed Germany to continue

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<sup>10</sup> Périér, *Séquestres et liquidations*, pp.10-13.

supplying coke to the Moselle's iron and steel factories,<sup>12</sup> other areas of the economy were left high and dry by the restrictions. The Treaty of Versailles eventually imposed a transitional regime, which, from 10 January 1920, awarded producers from the returned provinces a form of franchise allowing them to retain some of their customers in Germany. However, German clients were, not surprisingly, unwilling to co-operate and, in any case, had already sent their orders elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Equally, the German economy and that of the Moselle quickly fell out of step. Germany survived the 'world economic crisis' of 1920 and 1921, enjoying almost full employment, whilst elsewhere governments struggled with mass unemployment and social unrest. But, the inflationary period, which had begun during the war and culminated with hyperinflation shortly before the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1922, meant Germany could no longer afford to import iron and steel as the mark's buying power plummeted. Yet for the Moselle, its severance from what had been - up to 1918 - well-established markets, meant it had to await the emergence of new customers for its raw materials and products before its economy could begin to recover. These were hard to come by in the post-war climate. Although reconstruction in devastated areas required raw materials such as iron and steel, the erection of temporary buildings using timber was a quick and popular option in many areas. Likewise, a dramatic drop in demand for iron and steel in ship-building and munitions production had occurred world-wide. Orders from other industries, such as the up and coming car industry, picked up some of the slack. However, competition for contracts was stiff, and, crucially, the Moselle was slower than other regions to respond.

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 3, pp.94-96 which discusses the role of the various war-time committees and conferences dealing with such issues.

<sup>12</sup> The supply of coke was indeed problematic with regard to the region's economic recovery, and will be dealt with in a separate section later in this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Roth, *Encyclopédie illustrée. Le vingtième siècle*, p.41.



Short term solutions to issues raised by the French sequestration policy were few and far between. Initially, communications between France and its returned provinces were, in practical terms, extremely difficult, despite the Meurthe-et-Moselle's protestations. The front line, although no longer a battlefield, had left a scar across the countryside which was, as yet, difficult to traverse. Even without the war and its effects, rail links, telegraph lines, and even roads across the 1871/1918 national frontiers, were not well developed. In fact, it was not until 1931 that the direct railway line between Metz and Paris was completed. Likewise, there was no canal system linking this new north eastern corner of France to the French 'interior', Luxembourg, or Belgium.<sup>14</sup> Transporting supplies to the regions was therefore extremely difficult, as was sending goods and products in the opposite direction. Internally, despite the Meurthe-et-Moselle's assertions, transport systems were equally problematic. They were crucial in the reconstruction process, especially in the early days of *ravitaillement*, and the restoration of industrial activity. This was partly why the railways became such a sensitive area. The French authorities were caught between their desire to expel civil servants working in the railway and postal systems, and their need to keep the trains running, which involved retaining German personnel who made up the vast majority of managerial and supervisory posts. These were jobs which required skills and training which the indigenous population did not have. Hence the unpopular importation of *Français de l'intérieur*.

Further difficulties were caused by the sequestration of mines and industry ordered by the French authorities in November 1918. Sequestration, combined with the policy of expulsion, which removed all German directors and managers from their

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<sup>14</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.241.

posts,<sup>15</sup> meant that, with the exception of those interests owned by members of the indigenous population, all factories and mines had to be run by the French government through specially appointed sequestrators. The larger factories were run by the *service industriel de Lorraine*, and smaller factories and mines by the *service des mines*.

According to Roth, this caused businesses to become rapidly disorganized with the arrival of replacement directors who spoke no German, and who apparently bullied the Germanophone workforce.<sup>16</sup> Private industrialists and entrepreneurs, who eventually benefited from the liquidations, later claimed that the problems they faced in the mid 1920s had been caused by poor management on the part of government sequestrators.<sup>17</sup> Whilst such accusations are perhaps not surprising (an industrialist who blames himself for his industry's shortcomings is rare), the first of the liquidations did not actually begin until August 1919, and, although the majority of factories and mines had been liquidated by the end of 1920,<sup>18</sup> the passage of time between the end of the war and their attachment to new companies did little to encourage a speedy return to production, or to attract new investment. Once contracts had been settled elsewhere, it was very difficult to win them back. In fact, a report published by the *Association minière d'Alsace et de Lorraine* in 1920, suggests that demands made during the September 1919 miners' strike reflected the union's desire to,

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<sup>15</sup> Delahache, writing in 1921, stated that the Francophone population demanded the expulsion of all German directors 'à peu près tous pangermanistes avérés', but that their replacements were often made rather too hastily using unsuitable *Français de l'intérieur*. The army was obliged to provide many of the engineers required in the sequestration process, so that an *officier technicien* could be put in charge of every mine. Delahache, *Les débuts de l'administration*, p.44.

<sup>16</sup> Roth, *Encyclopédie illustrée. Le vingtième siècle*, p.40.

<sup>17</sup> The publication *L'Echo des Mines et de la Métallurgie* claimed this in its edition of 10 December 1922 (no.2762). Copy held in the EAU.

<sup>18</sup> By 1921, 24 mining concessions remained under sequestration, only one of which was being exploited. And by 1931, the French government remained in control of an insignificant number of mines. Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.68.



...consolider sa situation en obtenant des séquestres des avantages que n'accorderaient peut-être pas, après les liquidations, des industriels plus indépendants et par conséquent moins dociles aux suggestions de l'administration.<sup>19</sup>

Even before mining and industrial interests had actually been sold off, the sequestration process had played its part in creating uncertainty, as well as a difficult working atmosphere for the workforce, thereby delaying a return to normal production.

The liquidation process, once it got under way, radically changed the structure of ownership of both mining and heavy industry within the Moselle region.<sup>20</sup> French, Belgian, and Luxembourger companies profited most from the liquidation of heavy industry. Before and after liquidations took place, with the exception of the de Wendel companies, remarkably few mining concessions or factories were owned by Lorrainers. The French authorities sought to ensure that mines were sold off in groups, rather than under multiple ownership, as they had been under German rule. The post-war period was one of unprecedented concentration of ownership in French industry as a whole, and the Moselle entered the French economy just as this transformation was taking place.

The de Wendel family, whose mining and industrial interests surprisingly lay in both the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle (in other words, in Germany *and* France), had been sequestered during the war by Germany, returned to the Moselle immediately following the armistice. They not only retrieved their property, but increased their control of mining interests to nearly a fifth of all deposits in the

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Bonnet, *L'homme du fer*, p.213.

Moselle, thanks to the liquidation process.<sup>21</sup> At a time when post-war cash flow problems would have otherwise prevented them from making any new financial commitments, the de Wendels and other existing French, Belgian and Luxembourg groups and companies, joined forces with various banks from the three countries in order to bid for the Moselle's sequestered mines and factories. The Banque de l'Union Parisienne (which became Crédit Lyonnais), the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, the Banque de Bruxelles et Société Générale de Belgique, and the Banque Internationale du Luxembourg all participated in buying up the industrial valleys of Lorraine.<sup>22</sup> For example, factories previously owned by the Stumm brothers at Uckange, fell under the ownership of the Société Nord de Lorraine: the Roechling factories at Thionville joined the Société Métallurgique de Lorraine; and the Thyssen factories at Hagondange joined the Union des Consommateurs de produits métallurgiques et industriels. This latter, a consortium of 400 or so companies, produced materials and parts relating to the successful French car industry, including Renault, Panhard, Peugeot, and Fives-Lille. The French government gave excellent terms of repayment to the various groups and consortia, allowing them until 1940 to repay loans in annual instalments at an interest rate of only three percent. The size of the loans was further reduced by inflation during that period. However, it was not just these excellent terms which caused the French socialists to denounce the entire liquidation process as, 'la

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<sup>20</sup> See CARAN, AJ/30/213, for detailed information concerning the sequestration and liquidation of mines in the Moselle.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, the de Wendel family had been accused of making deals with both the French and German armies during the war, in order, it was said, to arrange protection for their factories and mines in both the Moselle and the Meurthe-et-Moselle. However, the accusations were found to be false. It is astonishing, though, that the de Wendels had succeeded in overriding the barrier of the Franco-German frontier in this way. It is a clear indication of the political and industrial power the family wielded before, during, and after the war.

<sup>22</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.207.



plus grande opération de piraterie de tous les temps'.<sup>23</sup> According to Precheur's figures, the three main industrial and mining zones of Hagondange, Rombas, and Knutange were sold for a total of 385 million francs. The estimated peacetime value of interests grouped in the three areas was 8 billion francs.<sup>24</sup>

Needless to say, nothing short of the complete nationalisation of mining and iron and steel production in the returned province would have contented the socialists. However, this 'royal cadeau', granted to companies and firms in the private sector (not all of whom were French), was, in fact, a simple solution to the problem of compensation for damage caused to their mines and factories in France during the war, for which Germany was ultimately liable through reparations payments to be agreed at the Paris Peace Conference. In other words, by selling off German sequestrations at 'knock down' prices, the French government was merely delivering compensation directly to industrialists. Indeed, the private sector had feared that the return of the Moselle to France might present a perfect opportunity for the French government to nationalize mining and industry. However, this fear was unfounded, and, according to Gérard, the government 'servit docilement leurs intérêts', preferring, it seems, to resolve the question of compensation rather than to make a large profit for the French treasury.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, the specific problems suffered by the Moselle's economy in relation to the sequestration and liquidation process, lay in the passage of time between the initial seizure of German interests by the French authorities, and their final attachment to new companies. This passage of time, although inevitable, was sufficient to allow a significant break in the continuity of management within each factory or mine, a

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<sup>23</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.208.

<sup>24</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.207.

problem which was compounded by new managers' lack of knowledge of the German language. However, these problems were not the only reason why the Moselle's economy fell behind that of its neighbour, the Meurthe-et-Moselle, as well as Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Saarland. After all, it took Lorraine's two industrial regions roughly the same length of time to reach a point where production could be resumed in earnest, one experiencing liquidation, the other, complete reconstruction of mining and industrial interests. It is necessary, therefore, to look elsewhere for the reasons behind the Moselle's relative economic stagnation.

*The Workforce* <sup>26</sup>

**Table 7: 'Foreigners' living in the Moselle, 1910-1926, by nationality (percentage of the total population in brackets)**

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1926</i>
<b>Germans</b>	164,502 (25.1)	44,899 (7.6)	32,520 (5.1)
<b>Italians</b>	26,133 (4.0)	15,354 (2.6)	31,945 (5.0)
<b>Lux'bourgers</b>	10,784 (1.6)	12,772 (2.2)	11,538 (1.8)
<b>Belgians</b>	1,347 (0.2)	2,579 (0.4)	2,023 (0.3)
<b>Russians</b>	377 (0.05)	759 (0.1)	2,233 (0.4)
<b>Czechs</b>	no figures <sup>27</sup>	825 (0.1)	1,900 (0.3)
<b>Poles</b>	no figures	5,644 (1.0)	20,755 (3.3)

<sup>25</sup> Gérard, p.107.  
<sup>26</sup> Unless otherwise stated, figures relating to the population as a whole and to foreigners in this section have been taken from the *Annuaire Statistique (Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, Moselle), Premier volume - 1919 à 1931*, p.36. ADM, BA 863.  
<sup>27</sup> Czechs and Poles were included in the figure for Germans in 1910.



Whilst changes in ownership of the Moselle's industry and mining brought disruption to production and therefore the region's economy, the post-war period also saw dramatic and damaging fluctuations in population, which had major consequences for the stability of the workforce. Since the 1890s, and the marked increase in industrial and mining activity in the Moselle, the existing indigenous workforce had been supplemented principally by workers from other German states (notably the Saarland, the Rhineland, and Bavaria). Increasingly, however, workers were recruited from further afield. As detailed above in table 7, in 1910, there were 26,133 Italians and 10,784 Luxembourgers living in the Moselle.<sup>28</sup> Apart from the 164,502 German immigrants living there in 1910, these two nationalities made up almost three quarters of the 'foreign' population. This non-indigenous population was distributed around certain key areas in the region. The German military and civil servants were found almost exclusively in urban areas, most notably Metz. Rural areas were hardly penetrated at all by the immigrant population. The German, Italian, Luxembourger, and remaining foreign workers were to be found in the industrial areas between Metz and Thionville, and around Forbach and Sarreguemines. The war itself drew many workers away from industrial and mining employment. In mining alone, the workforce dropped from 17,430 in 1913, to 7,064 in 1914. Production, however, continued in the region as the meagre workforce was supplemented by prisoners of war. For example, in 1916, 6,804 Russians were sent to be used in iron ore mining, whilst Belgians were sent to coal mining.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Germany had set up recruitment offices in Italy from 1905 onwards, to obtain labour for its industrial areas including the Moselle. France had done so from 1911 onwards, supplying the Meurthe-et-Moselle with labour in the same way. In the post-war period, when Italian recruitment recommenced, the pre-war connections were re-established, and used by French employers in both the Meurthe-et-Moselle and the Moselle. See Galloro, *Ouvrier de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>29</sup> *Notice sur l'industrie minière en Alsace-Lorraine pendant la guerre (1914-18)*, Strasbourg, 1920, produced by the *Association pour les intérêts miniers d'Alsace et de Lorraine*. EAU 10/96.

The post-war period, though, saw a radical metamorphosis of the nationality of the Moselle's population and, more specifically, its workforce.<sup>30</sup> In the population as a whole, the immigrant German community was dramatically reduced, with the almost comprehensive removal of military personnel and civil servants (with the exception of key areas, notably the railway and postal systems), coupled with the departure of the professional middle classes from urban areas. Germans had made up 25.1 per cent of the total population in 1910, a figure which was reduced to 7.6 per cent in 1921, and to 5.1 per cent in 1926. The number of Germans employed in factories around the region was reduced by a further 38 per cent, and in mining by 30 per cent between 1918 and 1919.<sup>31</sup> However, the pace of departures from mining and industry slowed over the following years, as employers requested that certain categories of skilled German workers be retained, since replacements were difficult to find. Even in 1925, industrialists still felt that it was 'indispensable aux usines de s'adresser en Allemagne à certaines catégories de spécialistes ou de techniciens'.<sup>32</sup> Equally, it was felt that many of the so-called 'troublemakers' had been removed in the first wave of expulsions. The remaining Germans were tentatively regarded as more reliable.<sup>33</sup> By 1926, in mining at least, the number of German miners remained significantly higher than any other foreign nationals.<sup>34</sup> The demands of industrialists and *patrons* during the post-war period, therefore, defined the limits of *épuration* in the Moselle industrial and mining zones.

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the Moselle's immigrant population (excluding German immigrants), came to the region almost exclusively as a response to the demands of industry and mining. In fact, non-German immigrants seldom worked or lived outside the industrial and mining regions. In 1926, for example, foreigners working in the region totalled 55,906, of which public services employed only 936, whereas industry employed 24,362, and mining and quarrying 21,585.

<sup>31</sup> Galloro, *Ouvrier de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>32</sup> ADM, 310 M 50. Report of 15 July 1925.

<sup>33</sup> See chapter 6, pp.238-244, for a comparison with Alsatian workers who were often the instigators of social unrest during the years which followed integration.



Perhaps surprisingly, the end of the war did not herald the immediate return of the many thousands of Italians who had departed in the early stages of the war, despite the gaps left in the Moselle's workforce by departing Germans. Their return was only sporadic in 1919 and 1920, especially in heavy industry. The first reason for this was a law which was passed by the French government immediately following the end of hostilities, which prevented 'la délivrance aux frontières de nouvelles cartes d'identité et de circulation pour les travailleurs étrangers du commerce et de l'industrie'.<sup>35</sup> It was not long, however, before the authorities were forced to allow the entry of certain categories of workers, such as miners, skilled construction workers, and chemical workers. The restrictions on the entry of foreign workers reflected the desire among the French authorities to ensure that newly demobilized French workers would not find their jobs already taken by foreigners.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, Italians were slow to return to factories and mines, as many of them found temporary work in the reconstruction of areas devastated by war, both in the north of Italy, and in other areas of France. However, figures from reports produced by the *Association des Maîtres de Forges de Lorraine*, show that - between 1921 and 1926 - Italians were arriving in the Moselle in far greater numbers. By the latter date, there were almost as many Italians in the region as there were Germans.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In 1926, there were 7,188 Germans employed in mining (including 96 women).

<sup>35</sup> Instruction from the Minister of the Interior of 6 January 1919, ADMM, 10 M 34, quoted in Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>36</sup> Such anxieties were shared by many governments faced with the problems of finding employment for demobilized soldiers, in order to stave off any potential revolutionary activity. In Germany, for example, women who had replaced male workers in factories and other professions during the war, were unceremoniously dismissed to make way for servicemen immediately following the war. Bridenthal, R, 'Beyond Kinder, Kuche, Kirche: Weimar Women at Work', in CEH, 6, No.2, p.149.

<sup>37</sup> See EAU, 10/96, *L'Industrie Sidérurgique en Lorraine depuis l'armistice. Compte rendu (années 1919 et 1920)* published by the *Association des Maîtres de Forges de Lorraine*. See also same publication for the years 1921 and 1922.

Italians were not the only foreigners to arrive in the region in the years following the end of the war. The number of Poles in the region rose from 5,644 in 1921, to 20,755 in 1926. Agreements between the French and Polish governments allowed Poles to enter France in order to find employment, but a rigid system of controls was established, ensuring that all prospective workers passed through a camp to the south of Nancy, a form of Ellis Island, where they were given medical examinations and identity papers. Those who were deemed unfit for work in factories or mines were returned to Poland. Likewise, the number of Czechs residing in the Moselle rose from 825 in 1921, to 1,900 in 1926: and, similarly, the number of Russians rose from 929 to 1,255 in the same period. Many of them had been high ranking officials in the Russian white army, or aristocrats fleeing the 1917 Revolution. Records from factories in the Moselle region in some cases list previous employment as 'Colonel in the Tsar's army', or simply as 'Prince'.<sup>38</sup> Between 1924 and 1925 at the *Société Métallurgique de Knutange*, more than a quarter of the workforce was Russian, due to links established by a former director of the factory in Russia before 1914.<sup>39</sup> The number of Belgians and Luxembourgers also rose steadily, the latter reaching 11,538 by 1926.<sup>40</sup> And, gradually, the mid 1920s saw the arrival in the region of small numbers of North Africans originating from French colonies.<sup>41</sup>

Most foreigners living in the region in the 1920s were recent arrivals in search of semi-skilled or unskilled work, and two thirds of them were male. In Thionville, for example, where half of all foreigners in the region lived, there were twice as many men

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<sup>38</sup> In factory records held by P-D Galloro.

<sup>39</sup> Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>40</sup> As was the case with workers from the Saarland, many Luxembourgers worked in the Moselle, but continued to live in their native country.

<sup>41</sup> Eventually, North Africans were to make up a significant community of workers in Lorraine. See Noiriél, Gérard, *Un siècle d'intégration des immigrants dans le pays Haut Lorrain. Approches socio-historique*, Paris, 1992, available through MIRE, Ministère des affaires sociales, Paris.



as women. Furthermore, the figures for certain nationalities show a more uneven balance between the sexes than for others. For example, there were equal numbers of men and women among Germans, Belgians, and Luxembourgers living in the region in 1926, whereas there were at least twice as many men as women among Poles, Italians, and Czechs, and five times as many men as women among Russians. Precheur also shows that Belgians, Luxembourgers, and Germans were far more likely to marry members of the indigenous population than other nationalities.<sup>42</sup> In part, language and culture certainly account for this statistic. But the fact that these nationalities were the most numerous, making up almost half of the total foreign presence in the region, must be also taken into account. Single women arriving in the region tended to seek work in commerce and manufacturing, although a large number of the German women who were already working in the region were employed in domestic work, education, and commerce. Overall, though, the imbalance between the sexes, only added to the instability of the workforce, as young, single men tended to be more footloose than those arriving with wives and families.

In the workplace, the problem of communication between so many nationalities was, in part, overcome by the use of words or jargon taken from all relevant languages, rather than by selecting one dominant language such as German. Even Lorrainers originating from neighbouring departments could not always find a common language. The same was true for Alsatian, Luxembourger, and Belgian workers, who all spoke different dialects. The introduction of languages as diverse as Russian, Italian, and Arabic only compounded the problem. Often symbols, rather than words, were used in notices, in order for employers to communicate with their workforce. In fact, guidelines were laid down and special regulations created for employers to help

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<sup>42</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.564.

them deal with the influx of foreign labour.<sup>43</sup> However, some employers regarded the cosmopolitan nature of their workforce as advantageous,

car il trouve en elle un élément stabilisateur au point de  
vue du mouvement ouvrier: ces individus de nationalités  
différentes ne causant pas la même langue ne peuvent pas  
se grouper pour imposer des revendications.<sup>44</sup>

In 1926, and despite the dramatic changes in the post-war period to the nationalities found among the region's foreign population, the largest foreign community in the Moselle was German, whilst still more Saarlanders, especially miners, escaped the statistics as they were *travailleurs frontaliers*, workers who lived in the Saarland but who crossed the border each day to work in the Moselle.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, Germans already living in the region, and foreign nationals, only made up part of the total workforce in the post-war period, the bulk of which contained a combination of *Mosellans*, Lorrainers from the region's three other departments, Alsatians, and *Français de l'intérieur*. Restrictions on the number of foreign workers entering the region, put in place immediately following the armistice by the French government, were aimed at placing the local population (now French), and demobilized soldiers from elsewhere in France, at the head of the queue in the recruitment process in the regions. However, war had only aggravated an existing demographic trend in France, which meant that other French departments were unable to supply large enough numbers of workers, either skilled or unskilled, to compensate

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<sup>43</sup> PRO, FO 371/8259. Report from Lord Hardinge in Paris to the British Foreign Office, 10 April 1922, p.59.

<sup>44</sup> Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>45</sup> Schill, Pierre, *Les grèves de l'immédiat après-guerre dans les mines de charbon de Moselle*, DEA, Bourgogne, 1997, p.103.



for the departure of Germans.<sup>46</sup> German machinery was unfamiliar to many potential recruits, and, in any case, most *Français de l'intérieur* - who had not previously worked in heavy industry - were not interested in that kind of work. Many came from rural backgrounds, and so were ill-prepared for mining or factory work. Most of those who did come to work in the Moselle at the beginning of the post-war period, were either from the Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Meuse, or the Vosges regions. Less than 5 per cent of the total workforce in the Moselle was made up of French workers from departments outside the region of Lorraine.<sup>47</sup>

This, however, was not how the region's press perceived the recruitment process. According to Serge Bonnet, in the spring of 1920, political and social unrest were caused by the belief among workers, prompted by the press, that Alsatians and *Mosellans* had been made redundant in order to make way for *Français de l'intérieur*, as the French authorities' policy of *francisation* was implemented. This claim drove the *Chambre syndicale de l'Industrie du Bas Rhin* to publish figures showing that in key factories in the region, such as at Hagondange, Uckange, and Rombas, as well as the Sarre-et-Moselle mines, departing Germans had, in fact, been replaced by 'Alsace-Lorrainers'. Indeed, according to these figures, the *Français de l'intérieur* represented 0.5 per cent of the workforce in March 1919, and only 2 per cent by April 1920, whereas the percentage of *Mosellans* and Alsatians rose during the same period from 47 per cent to 75 per cent.<sup>48</sup> This situation was repeated throughout industry, and throughout the early 1920s. However, the readiness of workers to believe that there was a conspiracy to replace *indigènes* with *Français de l'intérieur*, is the telling factor. This corroborates the thesis that the public relations exercise of the new

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<sup>46</sup> Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

administration was listing badly. It was all too easy for the *indigènes* to interpret French actions negatively, and to believe the incoming French would seek to dominate them in exactly the same way as the outgoing Germans.

Overall, however, the figures presented by the various censuses of the early 1920s, and those provided by individual industries and employers, give only a snapshot of the workforce and its distribution. What they do not accurately portray is the constant movement of workers, *indigènes*, *Français de l'intérieur*, and foreigners alike, not only around the region, but into neighbouring regions and countries. As wages varied in mining around the region by up to 7.7 per cent,<sup>49</sup> so they varied between factories, and between the Moselle, the Meurthe-et-Moselle, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Saarland. According to Galloro, the workforce itself had few national allegiances when it came to their search for work. Workers moved swiftly from one factory to another, and from one country to another, in search of higher wages. From this, Galloro concludes, that - as far as the workforce was concerned - the industrial region, of which the Moselle was only one part, was carved up by what workers saw as artificial frontiers.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Galloro shows that the movement of certain workers around the region was just as remarkable as the movement of other workers between factories within individual towns, allowing workers to enjoy stability in their home life, whilst enjoying the benefits of a form of 'work circuit', pursued in the interests of higher wages.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bonnet, *L'homme du fer*, pp.203-207. See also Schill, *Les grèves*, pp.235-236.

<sup>49</sup> Schill, *Les grèves*, p.94.

<sup>50</sup> See Galloro, *La main d'oeuvre des usines*.

<sup>51</sup> Further research in this area will hopefully shed light on the nature of the foreign sections of the workforce, and the possibility that a high turnover of foreign workers was a positive means of integration, due to their constant adaptation to new circumstances and situations.



This ever increasing mobility of the workforce, which made the supply of labour unstable, ran parallel to dramatic fluctuations in the demand for labour.<sup>52</sup> In other words, employers suffered as much from workers' infidelity, as workers suffered from the stop-start effect of production. Economic crises affecting most regions and countries in the post-war era, notably in 1920 and 1921, were partly responsible. However, the major cause of instability in the demand for labour was undoubtedly the wholly unreliable supply of coke from Germany's Ruhr valley, which was essential for the processing of iron ore in the Moselle. When coke supplies were low, employers in the iron and steel industry were faced with the dilemma of what to do with their workers. Whilst they could not afford to keep them on during periods of inactivity, once coke did begin to arrive, they were anxious to have a workforce near at hand to recommence production as quickly as possible. The socialist German-language newspaper, the *Volkstribune*, complained of this problem in June 1919, stating that even though the supply of coke had resumed, there was still a lack of skilled labour.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, the inactivity of iron and steel factories had a knock-on effect on demand for iron ore mined in the region, and therefore on the demand for miners. In 1923, the fact that iron ore production remained at 50 per cent of the 1913 levels, was blamed on the knock-on effect of the Ruhr crisis. And when, during the following year, the crisis ended and iron ore mining resumed, it only increased to 60 per cent of 1913 levels, due to a lack of miners.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is hard to establish which came first in the Moselle - instability in the supply of labour, or instability in the demand for labour - as the region was affected by factors not shared by the whole of the Saar-Lor-Lux region.

<sup>53</sup> Quotation given in French in Bonnet, *L'homme de fer*, p.209.

<sup>54</sup> EAU 70/41, MDF doc. 40, *Les Mines de Fer d'Alsace et de Lorraine en 1922, Bulletin no. 3911*, p.2.

During the early 1920s, employers' preoccupation with questions concerning their workforce led them to take unusual measures.<sup>55</sup> Redundancies were limited as much as possible. However, after the 1920 strike in the region, when the economic crisis was at its worst, employers were forced to make reductions. However, these were usually limited to foreign workers and Alsatians, rather than *Mosellan* workers. Once the crisis had passed, and production was no longer hindered simply by stagnating markets, employers attempted to find alternatives to sackings and redundancies as a means of preserving manpower. During periods of acute crisis, new recruitment was kept to a minimum, and alternative work was sought for industrial workers. The idea of 'farming out' workers to other areas of work, such as mining or agriculture, until production could resume was heralded a great success in the Moselle. For example, at Audun-le-Tiche, 'les ouvriers en surnombre à l'usine sont occupés à la coupe de bois'.<sup>56</sup> Even the perceived threat of communist activity among German workers in the factories was overlooked by the French authorities in the interests of retaining the workforce, ready for the industrial recovery. Where redundancies were made, for example, in factories at Uckange, they were regretted only a few months later when production resumed. Above all else, employers feared losing their skilled workers to other factories or regions.

Another solution to the problem was partial unemployment, where individual workers lost one or two days work per week. Employers were particularly sensitive to workers' family situations in reducing working hours. The *Association minière d'Alsace et de Lorraine* stated that redundancies should only affect casual and unmarried workers. As a result, at Ottange, unmarried workers were the first to lose

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<sup>55</sup> See Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, Princes du vent*.

<sup>56</sup> ADM, 320 M 30. Report by the *Sous-préfet de Thionville*, 17 February 1923.



two days work per week. Other examples show that foreigners were also more likely to be sacrificed than indigenous workers. Some workers even took the opportunity to carry out their military service on the basis which guaranteed work when they returned. In fact, according to Galloro, leave of absence, rather than redundancies, accounted for up to 28 per cent of all departures from factories in 1921, and up to 25 per cent in 1923. This greatly reduced the numbers of enforced departures.<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, the social perspective taken by employers in an attempt to stabilize the workforce does not appear to have worked convincingly. Despite concerns for married versus unmarried workers, and *indigènes* versus foreigners, employers were playing a game of 'catch-up'. The pattern of workers without loyalty to employer, company, or region, emerged as a result of changes brought by war, by French policy in the regions, in particular the *épuration* policy, by unpredictable levels of production affected by economic crises, and by the coke supply to the region. In other words, employers had as much or as little control over labour as they had over other factors of production in the 1920s. Thus, when the French Government sought the co-operation of industrialists, asking them to join the *Caisse départementale de secours contre le chômage*, many refused to join because, they said, of the severity of the economic crises.<sup>58</sup> But if the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of the workforce, and its recently acquired tendency to flit from one factory or region to another, were not enough to torment employers and destabilize output, there was another problem which played its part in hindering the Moselle's return to normal, competitive production. This was the problem of strike action.

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<sup>57</sup> Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.

<sup>58</sup> The French administration decided to retain the German system of unemployment benefit in the regions, rather than changing it to the French equivalent, in order to avoid delays, confusion, and unnecessary dissatisfaction within the population.

*Strikes and social unrest*

The strikes in the Moselle, in the aftermath of the First World War, must be read in the context of fears in France, and elsewhere, that a revolutionary moment was imminent. These fears were most clearly illustrated by the extensive preparations made by the authorities in the Moselle and Alsace, and in the rest of France, to repress the major working-class movement widely expected for May Day, 1920. In the years of the Spartacist rising and the Munich soviet, the communist republic in Hungary, the occupation of factories in northern Italy, mutinies in the French fleet in the Black Sea, the widespread strikes in France in 1919 and 1920, and the foundation of the French communist party, it was natural that the authorities should respond nervously to any form of social unrest and strike action in the Moselle. It was only to be expected in such a climate that the working out of post-war industrial relations would be tense.

Between 1919 and 1925, a total of 71 strikes took place in the Moselle in mining and industry, as well as in the postal and railway systems. There were two main periods of disruption: the first between 1919 and 1920, in the lead up to the world economic crisis; and the second in 1923, just as the Ruhr crisis was about to reach its climax. During the first period, 64,089 strikers were involved, and during the second, 25,192 were involved. However, in 1923, 1,114,056 days were lost to strike action, whereas in 1919 and 1920 only 659,232 days were lost. Between these two phases of disruption, strike action was more muted. However, the days of employer dominance over the workforce were long gone, and demands regarding pay and conditions, which the likes of the de Wendels would never have tolerated pre-1914,



were commonplace.<sup>59</sup> 'La lutte contre le patronat' had begun.<sup>60</sup> But how problematic were strikes? What caused them in the first place? And how successful were they in the light of the post-war economic crises, changes in ownership, and fluctuations in the nature and nationality of the workforce?

If the French press was to be believed, at the heart of every strike was a German instigator. On 26 April 1920, the Francophile newspaper, *Le Messin*, carried an article entitled, 'La Vérité sur les Grèves de Lorraine et d'Alsace. Les Boches sont les initiateurs du mouvement qui est dirigé contre la France'. The national press also took a keen interest in the departure of Germans, and the newspaper, *Le Matin*, published an article at the end of January 1919 entitled, 'A la porte les Boches'.<sup>61</sup> Strikes, especially in the autumn of 1919, were quickly attributed to German propaganda which was seeping in, it was said, from Germany through the French-occupied Saarland.<sup>62</sup> It was not just the press who believed Germans were the troublemakers. The *Directeur Général du Commerce, de l'Industrie et des Mines* wrote to the *commissaire général* in Metz complaining that one of the causes of strikes was to be found, 'dans le maintien d'un personnel allemand "trop considérable"'.<sup>63</sup> Many more accusations against Germans of a similarly vague nature are to be found in both the press and the administrative papers of the period, to the extent that responsibility for the failure of industry and mining to improve output was laid squarely at the door of the German workers and miners.

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<sup>59</sup> Jeanneney, Jean- Noël, *François de Wendel en République: l'argent et le pouvoir, 1914-1940*, Paris, 1976, p.117.

<sup>60</sup> ADM, 301 M 54. Report from the *Commissaire spécial* in Thionville addressed to the *préfet de la Moselle* in Metz, 30th July 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Schill, *Les grèves*, p.101.

<sup>62</sup> Roth, *Encyclopédie Illustrée. Le vingtième siècle*, p.40.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Schill, *Les grèves*, p.102.

Indeed, in November 1918, revolutionary workers' and soldiers' councils had brought production to a complete standstill, and factories were 'à la merci de meneurs allemands'.<sup>64</sup> These ringleaders apparently received their orders from unions whose headquarters were in Germany. According to Schill, in 1918, the first post-war strike in mines at the Vuilleron pits at Petite-Rosselle involved only German miners. Not one indigenous miner took part. However, as Schill points out, in the immediate aftermath of the region's return to French sovereignty, strike action among *Mosellans* would have been viewed as ingratitude of the highest order.<sup>65</sup> Again, in January 1919, further strike action took place in Gargan, where 80 per cent of miners went on strike in a pit at which 72 per cent of workers were German. Moreover, in pits with such high proportions of Germans, the miners' representatives were more likely to be German. Once the proportion of Germans was reduced, indigenous miners were able to take more control. This can be seen in April 1919, when strike participation by German miners was minimal, compared to participation by indigenous miners, and those from neighbouring French departments.

Overall, though, there appears to be little hard evidence to support the theory that Germans were consistently the trouble makers. French troops were soon drafted in to dissolve the revolutionary councils and to restore order, and, overall, the 'anarchic period' was short-lived. Admittedly, there were not always enough troops to maintain the level of control desired by some more fearful of the communist threat. Likewise, the formation of a suitable police force took some time to establish. This resulted in regular complaints from *administrateurs* sent to the numerous industrial

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<sup>64</sup> *L'industrie sidérurgique en Lorraine depuis l'armistice. Compte rendu (années 1919 et 1920 - premiers mois de 1921)*, published by the Association des maîtres de forges de Lorraine, p.6 EAU 10/96.

<sup>65</sup> Schill, *Les grèves*, p.104.



and mining trouble spots around the region, who requested extra support. However, not all communists were German, and conversely, not all Germans were communist. After the first wave of expulsions and repatriations, many of the real German trouble-makers had undoubtedly been weeded out, whilst those who remained were more interested in staying in employment, rather than causing political instability, social unrest, and revolution throughout France.

So what were the real causes of the numerous strikes which afflicted the Moselle during the early 1920s, and which pointed to such a high degree of social dissatisfaction? Transitional problems certainly account for some of the initial strikes, and a number of specific difficulties can be identified. The question of *valorisation* or the rate of exchange for the mark, was dealt with almost immediately by the new administration. As a general policy, a ministerial decree of 26 November 1918 ordered that marks in the returned provinces would be exchanged at a rate of 1.25 francs.<sup>66</sup> In fact, on the day of the armistice, the franc was worth only 0.7 of a mark. The collapse of the mark over the months and years which followed resulted in a catastrophic drop in its value against the franc, reaching 0.0000015 by 1923. As far as employees were concerned, the change in payment of their wages from marks to francs was, in itself, not the source of major difficulties. In some cases, such as in iron ore mines, it was decided that one mark would, in fact, equal one franc with a supplement paid at 25 per cent of the worker's wage, as compensation for high prices. However, a massive discrepancy emerged between labour costs and the price paid for products, especially in mining. This resulted in the gradual reduction in March 1919 of the hourly rate paid

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<sup>66</sup> As was shown in chapter 5, p.166, the exchange rate varied between holders of category A identity card holders and category D. The rates quoted here are those applied to wages where a clean break with the use of the mark was possible.

in certain mines.<sup>67</sup> At a time when prices were rising so quickly, these wage reductions were extremely unwelcome.

In fact, *la vie chère* was the most commonly voiced complaint in the post-war period, and was repeatedly identified as the main factor behind wage claims and subsequent strike action. In the immediate aftermath of war, the delivery of goods and supplies to the returned regions, bringing to an end shortages caused by the Allied blockade, disrupted prices of basic goods, and brought unfavourable comparisons with neighbouring regions. In fact, inflation continued throughout the period at an alarming rate, so that between 1913 and 1925, prices had increased in the Moselle region fivefold.<sup>68</sup> The increase was most dramatic between 1913 and 1921, after which prices dropped in response to the easing of the economic crisis, only to rise again in 1924 and 1925, as the Ruhr crisis reached its peak and then passed. Accordingly, pay demands in the regions followed similar patterns. Whilst workers and miners in the Moselle reacted to the diminishing worth of their wages in the face of the rise in the cost of living, the same trends were being experienced elsewhere in France. However, it was often specific events within the region which sparked unrest or strikes. For example, police reports describe how in October 1919, miners in Forbach were involved in a protest march against *la vie chère*. In particular, they demonstrated against shopkeepers who had fixed prices at unreasonably high levels. According to the police report, the miners were successful in their efforts, which made them particularly popular with the general public, as a reduction in prices was successfully achieved.

Other efforts were made to find a way around inflation, the first of which were *économats patronaux*, stores run by the owners of mines and factories who were able

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<sup>67</sup> Bonnet, *L'homme du fer*, p.213.



to protect miners from the fluctuations in market prices, and also from the effects of contraband which found its way onto the market. *Coopératives* also appeared, for example in Oeting, where they were run by workers rather than employers, who were accused of profiting from their captive consumers through the *économats*. According to Schill, such innovations by workers seeking to counteract rising prices, stem from pre-war habits when strike action was not an option.<sup>69</sup> In the post-war period, preservation of the levels of their pay were among strikers' demands, such as in the case of iron ore miners cited above, who were faced with a reduction of 25 per cent in their pay. In fact, in February 1919, workers in heavy industry demanded the introduction of a minimum wage as a result of the decreases in pay levels. In May 1920, as part of an agreement to end strikes which had begun the preceding month, minimum rates of pay were agreed for both skilled and unskilled workers.<sup>70</sup> On other occasions, strikes resulted from the desire to obtain increases in wages to keep up with the rise in the cost of living, for example in December 1919 in heavy industry in Rombas. However, this strike was brought to an end, not because of a pay agreement, but because employers threatened to close the factory down altogether.

Problems with pay, though, were not the only causes of strikes. The more general question of improvements in working conditions covered issues such as the reduction of the working day from ten hours to eight hours. This was one of the demands made by workers in heavy industry in February 1919. Paid holidays, the maintenance of the family allowance which had been introduced under German rule, and double pay on Sundays were also demanded with limited success (workers in

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<sup>68</sup> *Industrie sidérurgique en Lorraine, 1923, 1924, 1925. Compte rendu*, published by the Association des maîtres de forges de Lorraine, p.7. EAU 10/96.

<sup>69</sup> Schill, *Les grèves*, p.101.

heavy industry were offered an increase in pay of 15 per cent for working on Sundays). Political demands only crept into the equation once the various fragmented groups representing workers in the regions linked up with French trade unions, such as the CGT (the Confédération général du travail) in the spring of 1919. Demands included recognition of unions and the nationalisation of mines, a demand which had more relevance during the liquidation process than at any other time. But, with membership of national trade unions came increasing organisation and co-ordination, which, in turn, increased the success of strikes themselves. Strikes thereafter were more likely to coincide with those occurring in France as a whole, such as the strike in heavy industry in June 1919. But employers still believed that unrest was sparked largely by German separatist propaganda, which worked parallel to the CGT. The success of this is questionable in the Moselle if not in Alsace.<sup>71</sup>

Other, more localized, incidents continued to highlight problems which specifically affected the Moselle. One example of this can be seen in the strike which broke out in April 1920. As was shown above, it was believed that Lorrainers (*Mosellans*) were being made redundant by new French companies, anxious to make way for *Français de l'intérieur*. A general strike was called on the basis of the latter complaint, which extended throughout the returned regions affecting industrial and railway workers. Following this, employers went to great lengths to show that their recruitment policies were not biased in this way. Another example of regional factors affecting strike action can be seen in the connection made between strikes in the Saarland and then in the Moselle. Miners at the Petite-Rosselle pits followed the

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<sup>70</sup> *L'industrie sidérurgique en Lorraine depuis l'armistice. Compte rendu (années 1919 et 1920 - premiers mois de 1921)*, published by the Association des maîtres de forges de Lorraine, p.8, EAU 10/96.



Saarland's example of May 1919, where miners had already been on strike for a month. The reason for this apparent solidarity was clearly the fact that so many miners working in the Moselle's mines along the border were from the Saarland. In fact, miners in the Saarland returned to work a week after the Moselle's miners joined them. According to Schill, solidarity between miners in Germany and the Moselle became less common over the months and years which followed the armistice. However, there is repeated evidence that employers feared the reverse was the case, something which was to have an important impact on the voting habits of the middle classes, who feared the threat of a German-led revolution in the region's factories and mines.

In general, strike action in the Moselle reflected patterns which resulted from the problems of integration, both immediate and long-term, as well as economic fluctuations which put pressure on the levels, and the buying power, of wages. There is little evidence that workers in the regions consistently placed political motives above social or economic demands. Any inclination towards political or revolutionary action either resulted from the hangover created by the anarchic period at the time of the armistice or from the newly established links with French trade unions, especially the socialist CGT. Overall, the impact of strikes on productivity was not as severe as some believed, as very few strikes involved the entire workforce within specific factories or mines, let alone the region as a whole. However, coupled with the difficulties facing industry, mining, and the economy of the Moselle during the years following integration, strikes merely served to compound a situation which saw major fluctuations in output, demand, and supply. Timing of strikes, their extent and duration, were all unpredictable for employers who were struggling to control factors

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<sup>71</sup> *L'industrie sidérurgique en Lorraine depuis l'armistice. Compte rendu (années 1919 et 1920 - premiers mois de 1921)*, published by the Association des maîtres de forges de Lorraine, p.7, EAU

of production. However, what strikes reflect is the acute hardship and sense of unhappiness which affected the workforce during the first few years of the region's reattachment to the French economy. More often than not, strikes followed action taken by employers in an attempt to counter inconsistencies and uncertainty in other areas of production, the most important of which was the supply of coke.

### *The supply of 'combustibles'*

In January 1923, political, as well as economic factors, drove President Poincaré to initiate the occupation of the Ruhr district in Germany, an area which contained some of the richest coal mines in Europe. A group of engineers were sent to the region accompanied by various French and Belgian army divisions, whose task it was to ensure control of coal and coke production and their delivery to France. According to Kolb, the political reason for this action was the French desire to push Germany's frontier back to the Rhine, a process which should, in Poincaré's view, have been carried out at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>72</sup> The economic reason was Germany's failure to meet its reparations obligations, something which was crippling industry in the Moselle. The passive resistance carried out in the Ruhr district by its population, which brought coal production and transportation to a standstill over the months which followed, meant the situation escalated into a major crisis between Germany and France. The two countries were thrown into a state of conflict which saw coal and coke deliveries to France almost disappear altogether. The value of the German mark



plunged as a result of the heavy cost of inactivity in the Ruhr, and a lack of revenue from taxation and sales of coal, brought the German people to their knees, and forced their government to capitulate in September 1923.

For the Moselle, the occupation of the Ruhr marked the peak in the crisis in industry. It followed months and years of unpredictable deliveries of coke to the region's metallurgy industry, as Germany had failed to meet agreed levels set out in the Treaty of Versailles. French industrialists claimed the Germans were falsifying production figures for coke to make production look weaker than it actually was. The action had caused productivity in the Moselle's iron and steel industry to only stutter into life at the end of the war, which in turn had created such uncertainty in production and employment. Various reasons account for why the Moselle was so badly affected by this intermittent supply of coke. Firstly, the development of heavy industry in the region had been carried out in the context of German industry. Iron ore mined in the regions required a specific quality of coke, in order that it be successfully processed. That quality of coke was produced in the Ruhr district, and so the two mining regions were inextricably linked almost from the beginning of large scale production of iron and steel in the region. Other types of coke produced elsewhere were not as efficient or suitable as that produced in the Ruhr. For example, coke produced around Forbach, in the Moselle itself, was of an unsuitably crumbly quality. And François de Wendel, in his frustration at the lack of alternative sources, complained of British coke, 'prix élevés pour des cokes de qualité déplorable [mais qui] nous ont préservé d'un arrêt total'.<sup>73</sup>

According to Precheur, liquidation of the Moselle's industry, thereby severing it definitively from German ownership and German suppliers, caused the greatest

damage to the region's economy and industry over the subsequent years. But how could the French have done otherwise? In the aftermath of the First World War, the integration of the provinces could not easily have taken place without placing the Moselle's extremely profitable mining and industrial activity under French, or at least non-German, ownership. To continue allowing German companies and businessmen to profit from the region's resources would have been unthinkable. Rather, liquidation could only have worked if it had been accompanied by other arrangements, in order to ensure that the region could obtain a reliable supply of suitable coke from elsewhere. However, as can be seen above, such a supply was not readily available, and, in any case, transportation of coke from abroad to the region posed another difficulty, which could not be resolved quickly. The extension of the canal system in the north of France and Belgium to the Moselle and Alsace would take many years to complete.

Solutions to the coke problem in the Moselle's heavy industry, therefore, were not readily apparent in the years which followed *désannexion*. The occupation of the Ruhr, in the circumstances, seemed to be a last resort for an exasperated French government who wished to see Germany held to its obligations set out in the peace treaty. However, François de Wendel had been an early proponent of the occupation of the Ruhr. So much so that, when France finally sent troops into the region in 1923, many believed de Wendel himself had pushed Poincaré into the decision in order to ensure the provision of coke for his factories, which were starved of German *combustibles*. Behind this theory is the idea that Poincaré merely occupied the Ruhr in order to re-establish the supply route of coal and coke for Lorraine, not for any other, political, motives. In other words, not only did French industrialists benefit greatly from the liquidation process, but they were also able to influence the government in

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<sup>73</sup> Galloro, *Ouvriers de fer, princes du vent*, Part II.



assuring a reliable supply of coke. The historian, J-N Jeanneney, goes to great lengths to dispute this interpretation. He argues that the de Wendels, despite their political power and industrial dynasty (earning them the nickname *les nouveaux ducs de Lorraine*)<sup>74</sup>, were unpopular with the likes of Poincaré, who was overheard stating that, 'Ne croyez pas que, pour vous procurer du charbon, je vais risquer la vie d'un seul soldat français'.<sup>75</sup> Despite the strength of his opinion, and despite having been a proponent during the war of pushing French occupation of the Saarland further north to include the Ruhr, de Wendel's influence had its limitations. After all, why had it taken so long for the government to pay any attention to him? In any case, along with the *Comité des Forges* at the end of the First World War, the de Wendels were regarded by the Parisian politicians with distaste, if not distrust, due to the controversy surrounding the bombing of factories and mines in what had been French and German Lorraine. No one in Paris was ever quite sure how the de Wendels had handled relations with Germany during the war.

Overall, despite French action in the Ruhr which was motivated, at least in part, by concerns to re-supply the Moselle with coke, this supposed solution to the crisis in production came after four long years of struggle for the region's industry. It is little wonder that de Wendel felt the need to embark upon a 'petite croisade'<sup>76</sup> in order to rescue his own interests in the Moselle, as well as those of other industrialists. He was not alone in feeling that the Moselle had, in fact, been sacrificed. Archival documents and industrial reports are littered with references to, and evidence of, the

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<sup>74</sup> *L'Humanité*, 2 March 1923, cited in Bonnet, *L'homme du fer*, p.225. The article also gave the following description of the de Wendel brothers: 'Ils sont les maîtres de tous: les autres industriels sont leurs vassaux, les ouvriers sont leurs serfs, et le petit commerçant lui-même, étouffé par leurs éconômats, est sur le point de disparaître ou de perdre son indépendance.'

<sup>75</sup> Supposedly said to a Lorrainer industrialist, possibly François de Wendel, by Count Sforza. Quoted in Jeanneney, p.120.

<sup>76</sup> Jeanneney, *François de Wendel*, p.123.

problems created by the lack of coke in the region. In March 1919, the *Chef du service industriel de Lorraine*, Captain Witzig, wrote in his weekly report to Mirman in Metz,

La situation reste stationnaire dans les hauts fourneaux et aciéries de Lorraine. Les Allemands n'envoient de Westphalie que 4,000 tonnes de coke par jour pour la Lorraine, au lieu de 12,000 tonnes dont nous aurions besoin. [...] Sur 68 fourneaux en Lorraine, nous n'en avons actuellement que 26 en action.<sup>77</sup>

The situation fluctuated during the following years<sup>78</sup>, but even in the summer of 1922, only half the furnaces in the Moselle were in operation. Due to the urgency of the situation at the end of the war, an agreement was signed ahead of the Paris Peace Conference in Luxembourg envisaging the delivery of 411,000 tonnes of coal per month from Germany, to be divided between Luxembourg, the Saarland, and the returned provinces. The first convoys left the Ruhr on 27 November 1918, but ceased abruptly on 17 December, and did not recommence until January 1919. The sporadic nature of these deliveries was to be a feature of the supply of coal and coke from Germany until the mid 1920s.

It was hoped the Treaty of Versailles would have the last word in the matter, but it did not. Initially, this was due to transportation difficulties within Germany, as the rail system was in disarray due to strikes. However, it soon appeared to the Moselle's industrialists that the German coal industry was simply being provocative. The *Maîtres de forges* in the region became involved in sending representatives to the

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<sup>77</sup> ADBR, 121 AL 91. Report of 23 - 29 March 1919.



Ruhr in an attempt to requisition supplies. In fact, once the occupation of the Ruhr began, some of the Moselle's workers offered voluntarily to go to the Ruhr district to work in place of German workers, who were on strike as part of passive resistance. On 18 March 1923, *L'Eclair de l'Est* reported this 'heroism', stating, 'Nous tenons à féliciter chaudement des braves ouvriers lorrains qui ne demandent qu'à travailler en territoire ennemi pour la France.'<sup>79</sup> It is perhaps more likely that this offer was made out of desperation, as well as frustration, rather than out of patriotism for France, as the Ruhr crisis brought on a new wave of redundancies and wage reductions among workers. Heavy financial losses were reported by companies. For example, in July 1922, the Société Lorraine des Aciéries de Rombas declared losses of 27,455,684 francs, a sixth of the company's value. Simultaneously, the Société de Knutange announced even more depressing losses of 30,317,757 francs, which represented half of the company's value.<sup>80</sup>

The disastrous consequences of Germany's reluctant delivery of *combustibles* to the Moselle's metallurgy industry raises the question, why did industrialists in the region not seek a long term solution to the crisis, which, after all, had shown no significant sign of easing since French soldiers had arrived there at the end of November 1918? It was not until 1928 that any plans were made to develop a metallurgy plant capable of using the quality of coke produced in the Moselle. At that time, the region continued to rely on foreign supplies for 70 per cent of the coke used in the region. This meant that the Moselle was completely at the mercy of foreign

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<sup>78</sup> See reports sent by Lord Crewe and Lord Hardinge in Paris to the Foreign Office in London between 1922 and 1923. PRO, FO 371/9391 and FO 371/8259.

<sup>79</sup> Bonnet, *L'homme du fer*, p.225.

<sup>80</sup> PRO, FO 371/8259. Report from Lord Hardinge in Paris to Foreign Office in London, 10 July 1922.

factors, such as fluctuations in price and supplies.<sup>81</sup> What added insult to injury for the Moselle, was the fact that, whilst it remained at the mercy of the ebb and flow of international relations between France and Germany for its supply of suitable coke, Germany merely turned to Sweden to replace the supply of iron ore which had originally come from the Moselle. In this way, Germany was able to recover both its coal mining output, as well as its metallurgy production, whilst the Moselle could only fall further and further behind.

### *Agriculture and commerce*

Heavy industry and mining account for the bulk of economic activity in the Moselle region, and it was largely as a result of difficulties in this sector that integration of the region was so problematic.<sup>82</sup> However, other areas of the economy suffered their own crises of production and confidence, and this chapter would not be complete without discussing them. Rural districts in the region were the least affected by changes in sovereignty, and by the war. Some farmland was damaged by traffic travelling to and from the front, and other areas were plundered at the end of the war by the retreating German soldiers. However, the rebuilding of farms and the return to a normal farming routine in the region had its benefits, and the more innovative landowners and farmers brought in mechanisation and improved techniques. Dairy farming was favoured as a replacement for cereal farming, as it was more profitable in the light of improved methods of storage and the ever increasing urban markets.

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<sup>81</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.348.

<sup>82</sup> As well as coal and iron ore mines in the Moselle, there were also salt mines. There were also large numbers of glassworks, including the manufacturing of crystal and engraved or decorated glass. Ceramic factories, cement works, and potteries also contributed to the region's productivity.



Wine growing in the region experienced successive disasters, such as a fungal infection which killed off many vines, the disruptive effects of the war itself, and the introduction of stiff competition from the rest of France.<sup>83</sup> This last problem was highlighted by a wine law which was signed at Rambouillet in August 1921, and which was applied nationally, replacing the local law of 1909 in the returned provinces. The new law prevented Alsatian and *Mosellan* wine growers from adding 'sugar water' to the wine which, they claimed, was necessary in order to counter the harsh flavour of their grapes. Without this 'sweetener' the wine became considerably less appealing than wines in the rest of France, and therefore less competitive.<sup>84</sup> The severance from German markets for white wine provided the final blow for many wine producers in the Moselle region. The cultivation of mirabelles (a small, hard, yellow fruit resembling the plum) and strawberries, especially around Woippy to the north of Metz, replaced many of the vineyards. A whole way of life had come to an end. Beer production in the regions had increased dramatically during annexation, thanks, largely, to demand created by the immigrant German population, but also due to the changes in taste among an increasingly urban and industrial population. Reattachment to France, therefore, created difficulties for breweries whose best customers were departing in their thousands.

Major changes in commercial activity in the regions created both winners and losers.<sup>85</sup> According to Roth, the liquidation of German property was to allow numerous property agents and dubiously qualified intermediaries to line their pockets with hefty profits, not to mention those who obtained businesses and property at prices pitched well below market value. Likewise, banks also benefited as assets, including

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<sup>83</sup> Roth, *Encyclopédie Illustrée. Le vingtième siècle*, p.44.

<sup>84</sup> Report from Lord Hardinge in Paris to the Foreign Office, 5 September 1921. PRO, FO 371/6990.

savings belonging to German subjects, were frozen and remained so until liquidation took place. Roth, like so many others who have made passing comments about the subject of liquidations, gives no specific evidence of the profits made through liquidations. Apart from the liquidation of mining and industry, for which figures are more readily available (although not always completely reliable), there is virtually no official record of how much small businesses and domestic properties were sold for, or to whom.<sup>86</sup> Whatever the finer details of this process, the benefits to those who gained from the liquidation process were very great indeed, and have contributed to the general sense of shame which the indigenous population still appears to feel for this period, especially in view of the fact that, in 1871, the incoming German authorities left all property and businesses belonging to *indigènes* intact.

The losers, on the other hand, included those who, during German annexation, had bought German securities (such as government bonds, war bonds, and municipal loans, and so on). The bankrupt German economy was not in a position to repay them. Other problems emerged. For example, many *indigènes* who lived around Forbach had opened bank accounts in the Saarland during annexation. Despite French occupation of the region, these banks fell outwith the regulations created specifically for the returned provinces and therefore *valorisation* could not apply. 'Il s'agit en général de petites gens, pour qui la perte sur le change signifie un dommage des plus sensibles.'<sup>87</sup> Taxation within the returned provinces proved a difficult issue, bringing complaints in the press and from politicians regarding the perceived imbalances

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<sup>85</sup> See also Chapter 4 *Legislative assimilation*, p.136-140.

<sup>86</sup> It has been suggested that the most reliable way of obtaining answers to these questions would be to examine any remaining legal records held by solicitors for the period, most of which are governed by the 50 year and 100 year rules. Certainly, understanding of this period would be greatly enhanced by further research into the entire sequestration and liquidation process in the inter-war period.

<sup>87</sup> This point was raised in the *Bulletin de Presse Alsacienne* of 9 May 1919, ADBR, 121AL162. A similar problem existed for Alsatians living on the border with Baden.



between Alsace, the Moselle, and the rest of France. Guy de Wendel (François de Wendel's brother), a Lorrainer deputy in the French Parliament, wrote to Alapetite claiming taxation was higher in the provinces than elsewhere in France. Alapetite replied at length, pointing out that 'state taxation' had been brought in line with that in other departments, but because of the survival of the German taxation system at local level, taxes could be higher as a result.<sup>88</sup> Similar fears were expressed with regard to possible changes to the system of industrial insurance brought in by the Germans. These, however, are examples of how complications could arise during the period of transition and from one system to another, where financial imbalances were feared, especially at times of economic uncertainty. Overall, matters appear to have balanced themselves out, as can be seen in the case of the social security system, which was put in place during annexation and, due to its popularity with the local populations, continues to this day.

### *The 'Malaise économique'*

The feeling is very obviously gaining ground that all is not well with Alsace and Lorraine. We have now to deal with a "Malaise administratif", a "malaise économique", and a "malaise psychologique" ... Business was never worse and yet there are no signs of determination on the part of employer and employee to solve their problems, and the spirit of inertia seems to have taken hold.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Report from Lord Hardinge, Paris, to the Foreign Office in London, of 5 May 1922, PRO, FO 371/8259.

<sup>89</sup> Report to the Foreign Office by Lord Hardinge in London, 5 September 1921, PRO, FO 371/6990, p.234-235.

According to figures produced by the *Comité des forges de France*, in 1919, the Moselle produced 31.1 per cent of the total iron and steel production in France. In the following year this increased to 35.4 per cent, despite the fact that only a third of the region's furnaces were functioning.<sup>90</sup> The Moselle's failure to regain pre-war production levels, therefore, had a very large impact on the French national output, to the extent that improvements made in other iron and steel areas in France were offset by the Moselle's meagre contribution. In 1922, for example, France was able to produce only 57.6 per cent of its 1913 output of cast iron. In 1923, this rose to 60 per cent. The following year, 1924, with the ending of the Ruhr crisis and the arrival of more reliable supplies of coke in the Moselle, output rose to 84.8 per cent. Yet, it was still well behind Belgium, which had achieved 113 per cent of 1913 levels.<sup>91</sup> By 1929, Precheur shows that whilst the Moselle had achieved 98 per cent of 1913 iron ore production levels, Luxembourg had reached 114 per cent, the Meurthe-et-Moselle, 122 per cent, the Saarland, 153 per cent, and Belgium, 163 per cent.<sup>92</sup> Although France compensated in other areas for the Moselle's shortcomings, how much better could French productivity have been had the Moselle's output not stagnated in the 1920s?

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<sup>90</sup> *Statistique des caisses d'épargne publiques. Années 1919 à 1920*, published by the *Commissariat général de la République*, p.93, ADM, BA 260.

<sup>91</sup> Bulletin no. 3849, *Production de fonte pendant l'année 1924*, published by the *Comité des forges de France*, 6 March 1925, p.2. EAU.

<sup>92</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.241.



### *Concluding remarks*

The pattern which emerges in the integration of the Moselle's mining and industry into the French economy is one of major blows and knock-on effects. Sequestration of German-owned factories and mines made the initial period of recovery uncertain and sluggish. Liquidation severed links between the Moselle and its long-standing supplier of coke, hindering new factory and mining owners in their endeavours to make new acquisitions pay. Fluctuations in deliveries of coke, thereafter, disrupted both the production of metallurgy goods, as well as the demand for iron ore in the region's mines. This, in turn, created multiple problems for both employers and employees as the workforce proved unreliable, and often workers were unavailable when production could recommence. At the same time, wages decreased and redundancies increased, driving workers and unions to repeat strike action. A *malaise économique* fell over the region as it stumbled from one crisis to another, a *malaise* which did not only affect the entrepreneurs and the *patrons*, but also the workers, labourers, and employees throughout the region. Periods of recovery and optimism, whilst evident elsewhere in other industrial regions, are harder to identify in the case of the Moselle. It is almost impossible to tell exactly why investment failed to flow into the Moselle following integration. But ultimately, this web of difficulties, coupled with hostile Franco-German relations which weakened the Moselle's geographic situation, and the general lack of capital in the post-war era, all conspired successfully to deter investors. The Moselle was, indeed, 'sacrificed' in the 1920s. But this was not deliberate or planned. Rather, it occurred through neglect and through an impromptu conspiracy of elements affecting all factors of production. It is therefore with a correctly pitched note of

gloom and despondency that Precheur summarizes the state of the Moselle's economy in the 1920s. 'La rupture du combinat Ruhr-Lorraine n'avait pas amené la création d'un autre combinat Lorraine-Moselle. La crise fut sans doute pour quelque chose, l'inertie du capitalisme fit le reste.'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Precheur, *La Lorraine sidérurgique*, p.350.



### *Summary*

In 1914, the Moselle region, as part of the German economy, enjoyed expansion and success with a neatly structured economy featuring plentiful raw materials, reliable suppliers, numerous customers, and a skilled and ever increasing workforce. The war, and its consequences, changed everything, and prompted a series of disasters.

Compared to the surrounding regions, the Moselle's recovery from this was sluggish and unimpressive. Sequestration and liquidation of German industrial and mining interests brought about a severance of the region's mines and factories from the supply of German raw materials, such as essential coke from the Ruhr valley, and from German demand for the final products. The departure of many, though not all, German workers from heavy industry brought about a period of instability in the supply of labour. Many gradually returned from Italy, whilst others arrived from Eastern Europe for the first time. Yet, as the supply of raw materials required for the production of iron and steel fluctuated, so did the demand for labour, and employers were torn between keeping an available workforce to hand, and laying off workers when there was no money to pay them. Such was the uncertainty, combined with rising prices and social unrest, that strike action was frequent, though not always co-ordinated. Attempts to resolve the supply of coke included the French occupation of the Ruhr, although this was not Poincaré's primary reason for the action. Yet even this came very late in the day, by which stage stagnation in production had irreparably damaged industry and the economy of the Moselle. The *malaise économique* in the region, caused primarily by heavy industry and mining, but extending into agriculture and commerce, arose due to this vicious circle of factors which did little for market confidence, and discouraged new investment.

## Chapter VIII

### Politics and Opinion

Whilst previous chapters have charted the development of the various strains of what was known as the *malaise lorrain*, this chapter will examine how this sense of unease and dissatisfaction dictated the pace of post-war political development in the region. Equally, a more general assessment of opinion<sup>1</sup> within the heterogeneous, *mosellane* population will be made. Such an assessment is fraught with difficulties and complicating factors: the absence of both women and German immigrants from the electoral register in 1919, thereby limiting any conclusions which could be drawn from election results; the subsequent inclusion of naturalised male Germans among the electorate following the application of the Treaty of Versailles; the instability of the population, with the simultaneous departure of German immigrants and the arrival of *Français de l'intérieur* and immigrant workers; an unstable class structure; and divisions between urban, suburban, industrial, and rural areas. However, by examining post-war political parties and political movements, election results, and the role of religion as well as the extent of religious belief in the region, a picture, albeit fragmented, of opinion and factors influencing opinion within the region can be compiled.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term 'public opinion' is avoided here as it tends to imply a prevalence or unity of opinion, which was clearly not possible within the region's very mixed population. Much of the existing historiography on this period for the Moselle refers to the opinion, beliefs, or actions of 'une population' which is misleading (see for example Bonnefont, *Histoire de la Lorraine*, p.127).



## *The Electorate*

Before assessing the outcome and implications of the 1919 and 1924 general elections<sup>2</sup>, it is essential to examine in detail the nature of the electorate.<sup>3</sup> Those not included on the electoral role, as in the rest of France, included women.<sup>4</sup> However, in Germany, universal suffrage had been extended to include women, thanks to the constitution of the Weimar Republic. Nonetheless, there appears to have been little comment on this issue in the press in 1919 giving any indication of women's reaction in the Moselle to this development.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the region's press had always been a distinctly male domain with only occasional contributions on political issues by women. In 1919 at least, attention was turned in the direction of questions raised by integration, including the religious question which was, for many women, of central importance in their lives. By contrast, a *commissaire spécial* in Thionville reported that, for the first time, the presence of women at communist meetings in Hayange had been noted.<sup>6</sup> However, according to his reading of the situation, women were being recruited to the movement as a means of encouraging children to join the communist youth movement. Nevertheless, the absence of women from the electoral role of the

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<sup>2</sup> 'General elections' refers to *élections à la chambre des députés*, or legislative elections to the French Parliament.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Annuaire Statistique (Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin, Moselle), Premier Volume - 1919 à 1931*, ADM, BA 863 and the *Office de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine, comptes-rendus*, ADM, BA 260, for all election statistics and information concerning the electorate contained in this chapter. A particularly useful reference volume for elections in the Moselle, including election programmes presented by the various parties, was compiled under the supervision of Georges Livet and Guy Cabourdin under the title *Les élections dans le département de la Moselle*, Fascicule IV - 1919-1939, published by Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, Collège Littéraire Universitaire de Metz, ADM 63 J 6/2.

<sup>4</sup> It is assumed that the authors cited in this chapter were aware of the fact that women were not included in the electorate during this period, despite their failure to mention the gap which this leaves in the political profile of the region.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps further research into women's clubs and *associations* may shed some light on this area.

<sup>6</sup> Report sent to the *préfet de la Moselle*, 30 July 1921. ADM 301 M 54.

region severely limits the historian's ability to assess their opinions and attitudes to key issues.

A further hindrance is the absence of the sizeable German community from the electorate, a community which had, of course, been eligible to vote in pre-war elections in the region. Under the new French administration, only those in possession of identity cards A and B were allowed to vote, which meant that those Germans who might have been resident in the region all their lives were prevented from voting.<sup>7</sup> The Treaty of Versailles allowed many of them to gain French nationality through the naturalisation process, which, in turn, allowed them to vote. However, this process had not begun by the time the first general elections were held in the region in November 1919. Likewise, as was the case elsewhere in France, none of the other immigrant populations (from countries other than Germany) was able to vote. In view of the increasingly high numbers of immigrants who arrived during the years which followed the end of the war, their absence from the electorate once again limits any conclusions which can be drawn from election results.

As can be seen in table 8 on the next page, those eligible to vote in November 1919 came to 116,409 out of a total adult population of 467,810, the equivalent of 24.9 per cent. The number of votes actually cast came to 96,971, or 20.7 per cent of the total adult population. Once again, this puts election results in perspective since only a fraction of the total adult population residing in the region expressed any kind of political opinion. In fact, the turnout in the elections of November 1919 was remarkably good (83.3 per cent of the electorate), and this was repeated in 1924, when there was a turnout of 83.4 per cent.

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<sup>7</sup> Again, French *désannexion* contrasts sharply with German annexation 47 years before when the region's indigenous male population was automatically included in the electorate.



**Table 8: Breakdown of the 1919 electorate.**

<i>Total population</i>	589,120
<i>Adult population</i> <sup>8</sup>	467,810
<i>Eligible to vote</i>	116,409
<i>Turnout</i>	96,971

These remarkably high percentages reflect the extent to which eligible voters had been motivated by events surrounding the integration of the province into France.<sup>9</sup> It has been claimed that such a turnout reflected the desire among the populations to create, through general elections, a form of plebiscite in favour of France. Baudon, for example, in his study of elections in the Moselle, stated it was generally agreed that these first elections, 'devaient ... démontrer à l'Allemagne et à l'Univers que les Lorrains étaient décidés ... que les premières élections devaient avoir ... un caractère nettement unanime de foi patriotique'.<sup>10</sup> However, Baudon's assumptions of a unanimity of intent among the population, and of a 'communauté de sentiments', are unproven. A more general conclusion would be that, in the first elections held since the Moselle's return to France, the indigenous population was free to vote for parties formed for and by *indigènes*, in circumstances which were clearly very different from

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is for 1921. This is the closest reliable figure for the adult population and has been obtained from census results. Whilst changes will have occurred in the total adult population between 1919 and 1921 due to the departure of German immigrants, this will have been largely compensated for by the arrival of foreign workers and *Français de l'intérieur*. *Office de Statistique d'Alsace et de Lorraine. Compte rendus*. ADM, BA 260.

<sup>9</sup> Cantonal elections, though, did not demonstrate the same enthusiasm. According to a report sent to the British Foreign Office on 12 June 1922 by Lord Hardinge from Paris, only half the electorate cast their votes in these elections on 14 May. In the municipal elections in Metz on 28 May 1922, 60 percent of voters cast their votes. Such indifference on the part of the electorate, it was claimed, was responsible for letting in left-wing extremists. PRO, FO 371/8259.

<sup>10</sup> Baudon, E.L., *Les élections en Moselle, 1919-1956*, Metz, 1956, p.9. See also Printz, *La vallée usinière*, p.167.

those they had experienced under German rule. Voting was strongest in industrial areas and the largest turnout was in the *arrondissement* of Thionville-Ouest, where 88.1 per cent of the electorate voted. In contrast, Metz-Ville had the lowest turnout of 77.9 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

The overall size of the electorate rose significantly from 116,409 in 1919, to 137,697 in 1924. This was due to the inclusion of a small number of naturalised Germans, as well as a small number of other nationalities, but mainly because of the arrival of *Français de l'intérieur*. From the very first elections, the German immigrant community was completely disenfranchised. Yet, despite the lack of firm evidence from election results, which might have given some indication of the political views of those Germans still remaining in the region, civil servants and politicians alike still made claims about political extremism brewing among Germans. In fact, the political opinions of those Germans living in the region at the end of the war are difficult to assess by reference to the distant elections of 1911.<sup>12</sup>

Another aspect of the electorate which is problematic is its religious profile, as the available statistics only indicate the religion of the population as a whole. In 1910, 85.7 per cent of the population was Catholic, 13 per cent was Protestant, and 1.1 per cent was Jewish. These percentages had changed dramatically by 1921, as the Catholic population had increased to 92.4 per cent, Protestants accounted for only 4.8 per cent, whilst there had been no change in the percentage of Jews. Compared to the

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<sup>11</sup> It is not clear why there should be such a difference in turnout between these two constituencies. In particular, a higher turnout might have been expected in Metz. Due to the large number of *optants* who had left following annexation and the subsequent arrival of German immigrants, the city's *indigènes* had gradually been outnumbered by Germans, allowing the election of a German mayor. In 1918, the reversal of Germany's fortunes brought about a backlash in the form of denunciations against Germans living there, as well as violence against German shops and property.

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the majority of Germans who did depart during this period were civil servants and members of the liberal professions, in other words, sections of society least likely to indulge in 'Bolshevik' politics, leaving behind the more militant industrial and railway workers.



Bas-Rhin and the Haut-Rhin, the Moselle shows the most marked change during the period 1910 to 1921 in the proportion of Catholics to Protestants. The fact that, in 1871, Protestants accounted for only 3 per cent of the population, indicates that the majority of Protestants living in the Moselle during the latter years of annexation were German immigrants. The impact of *désannexion* and the expulsion process on the Protestant community was therefore devastating.<sup>13</sup> Among those departing were, of course, numerous ministers and members of the Lutheran and Reformed Church hierarchies. The process of recruiting ministers to replace these *départs*, in order to continue serving the depleted Protestant community, was carried out by the Reformed Church in areas such as Germanophone Switzerland. Swiss ministers were appointed to parishes in Algrange, Hagondange, Fontoy, and Boulay. Some were even brought in from France, but with limited success. The recovery period was therefore marked by linguistic difficulties and many communities felt isolated, their clubs and associations destroyed by lack of numbers and support, and their churches too large for their diminished numbers. The arrival of Protestant Czechs and Hungarians, as well as a constant flow of Protestant Alsatians, modified the situation, as did the return of some *émigré* Protestant families to Metz. However, as far as political representation was concerned, this small, fragmented community was to find the political arena dominated by Catholic political parties. Whilst during annexation Protestants had been traditionally liberal, many had moved towards the SPD at the end of the nineteenth century, precisely because it was not linked to Catholicism. However, by the mid-1920s, the absence of a socialist party in the Moselle had encouraged many of them to turn to the communists.

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Wahl, 'Les protestants mosellans durant l'entre-deux-guerres (1918-1939)', in Le Moigne and Michaux, *Protestants, Messins, et Mosellans XV<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Metz, 1988, pp.265-273.

Further difficulties with the statistics regarding religion in the Moselle, lie in the problem of establishing the numbers actively practising their religion, the impact religion had on their everyday lives, and, for members of the electorate, on the way they voted. K's diary<sup>14</sup> indicates a very high degree of involvement by the Catholic Church in the daily life of her family, but also of the entire local, Francophone community. Yet, Schill notes that *curés* posted to the mining areas to the north of the region (Germanophone Moselle) complained to their superiors that among the mining communities, they found themselves in 'de véritables terres de mission'.<sup>15</sup> Schill's example, however, does not seem to reflect the general trend in the region, as Kieffer's evidence shows. According to him, Catholic values had a profound impact on the daily lives of the majority of the Moselle's population, visible in the seasonal pattern of marriages, unchanged in the Moselle since the eighteenth century - although this could, in some cases, be explained by habit, rather than by strict observance.<sup>16</sup> As the church forbade marriage during Advent (the month of December) and Lent (the month of March), every year, there was a sudden rush of marriages in November and February. Furthermore, the Catholic hierarchy had consistently held a very significant grip on the political life of the regions, with numerous members of the clergy standing for election at local, regional, and national level. Members of the clergy were also deeply involved in the press, but not just religious or literary publications. They were to be found at the head of daily newspapers, such as *Le Lorrain*, the leading Francophone, Francophile, Catholic newspaper, run by the *abbé* Collin, whilst clashes between clerical editors and journalists, due to linguistic or even national differences of opinion,

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter six *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Schill, *Les grèves*, p.239.

<sup>16</sup> Kieffer, *L'enseignement primaire mosellan*, p.72.



were commonplace. Even bishops involved themselves in such matters, enthusiastically encouraging good Catholics not to buy laic or neutral newspapers, which they referred to as the 'mauvaise presse'.<sup>17</sup> Overall, though, as will be shown in later sections, voting patterns in the Moselle only reflect in a very general way the religious profile and behaviour of the population. It is clear that religion was neither the only factor, nor the most important factor, in dictating voting patterns in the Moselle during this period.

Despite the major qualifications noted above, which show the electorate to be anything but representative of political opinions held by the entire *mosellan* population for either the 1919 or 1924 general elections, this is not to suggest that election results should be disregarded altogether. Although the 1919 electorate was made up largely of male *indigènes* or *Mosellans de vieille souche*, the emerging political parties were to find that there was no simple formula for winning their support, either in the form of simple patriotism, or by prioritising along regional lines.

### *The Political Parties*

In March 1919, Mirman sent a report to the *sous-secrétaire d'état à la présidence du conseil* commenting on the transformation of the German Catholic Centre Party (the Zentrum), into the *Union Républicaine Lorraine* (URL).<sup>18</sup> In fact, the URL emerged on the right of *mosellan* politics, as centre and right parties in German politics melted away, and the *Parti lorrain indépendant* (previously the *Groupe lorrain*) found itself

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<sup>17</sup> Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.44.

<sup>18</sup> Report of 21 March 1919, ADBR, 121 AL 863. For the most thorough and reliable study of the Catholic Centre Party in Alsace and, to a lesser extent, Lorraine, see Baechler, Christian, *Le Parti Catholique Alsacien 1890-1939. Du Reichsland à la République Jacobine*, Paris, 1982. The Alsatian equivalent of the URL was the *Union Populaire Républicaine d'Alsace*, the UPRA.

suddenly free from German politics.<sup>19</sup> In its programme, the URL set out its desire to see

Adaptation, dans un délai aussi rapproché et dans une mesure aussi large que possible, de nos lois à la législation française, en apportant à cette fusion le concours d'un esprit démocratique et régionaliste profondément dévoué à la République et à ses institutions.

Clearly, this final declaration of commitment to *la République* was a declaration of patriotism and loyalty to France, rather than to the laic republic itself. A commitment to complete integration into France was qualified by reference to 'un esprit régionaliste', which was entirely at odds with the centralised Third Republic, but equally by several other points of the programme including the fourth which stated, 'Maintien de nos institutions religieuses actuelles', as well as by the sixth point which called for, 'Maintien à l'école de son caractère éducateur actuel sur le terrain national, social et confessionnel, conformément à nos traditions.'

Mirman's overall assessment of the party's programme was that it did not rule out the principle of separating the Church from the State in the long term, as was intended by republican laic laws. In fact, he was later to be proved wrong in his interpretation, since the party, and in particular Robert Schuman, one of its leading members, were to be at the centre of the struggle in 1924 against the Cartel des gauches' attempt to introduce the laws in the region. However, it is not in the least surprising that the main party in the Moselle to be formed in the aftermath of

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<sup>19</sup> See Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.537, for details of the creation of the *Parti lorrain indépendant* in 1907. See also Roth, François, *La vie politique en Lorraine au XXe siècle*, Nancy, 1985, p.42.



integration should opt for a regionalist approach. After all, the population had become accustomed to Germany's federalist style of administration and politics. This was not, though, regionalism of the autonomist kind. The URL had clearly no intention of supporting the idea of a separate Moselle region, or of joining forces with Alsace. Equally, it was not surprising that this party should place the defence of religion, notably Catholicism, at the heart of its programme, as this group, who made up 93 per cent of the region's population, had everything to fear from a laic, Jacobin republic, and were to look to a regional party to defend them in Paris.

The URL's election list in 1919 contained a distinctly middle class, professional group of Francophile, Francophone (with the exception of Schuman who spoke French, German, and Luxembourgish) candidates. They included the medical practitioner, Dr. Charles François who was also mayor of Delme, a small town in the Francophone sector of the region: Robert Schuman, a young lawyer practising in Metz; General de Maud'Huy, the first military governor of Metz; Louis Meyer, a merchant and mayor of Walscheid; the industrialist, Guy de Wendel; and Robert Sérot, an agricultural engineer, and the son of a Metz businessman who had emigrated to Paris in the 1870s. The list also included the *abbé* Louis Hackspill, and the president of the *Souvenir Français*, Jean-Pierre Jean.<sup>20</sup> Such an array of *notables* instilled a sense of confidence in a large section of the electorate, especially in the Francophone sector.

Through this newly emerged ruling class, the party's colours were plain to see: a loyalty to France, to the Catholic religion, and, most significantly, to the Moselle region. This last, regional commitment, was known as *particularisme*, a sense of the

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<sup>20</sup> Jean was, by profession, a typographer.

region's particular identity, and was to play a central role in the URL's success in almost all elections in the 1920s following the party's creation.<sup>21</sup> However, such a seemingly contradictory combination of loyalties had no obvious equivalent in the post-war political parties of the Third Republic, and direct affiliations with parties from the 'interior', and likewise from Alsace, were firmly rejected. It was therefore necessary for URL delegates elected to the Paris Chamber to ally themselves with existing national parties on an individual basis. Those elected to the Chamber adhered to the *Entente Républicaine Démocratique*, even though, occasionally, the subject of forming an independent Alsace-Lorraine group was broached. As a result, the URL deputies were able to sit in the *Bloc national* government between 1919 and 1924. However, throughout the 1920s, this question of affiliation in Paris continued to exercise the minds of the elected URL candidates, as few of the national parties responded satisfactorily to their needs.

Despite the unity of the central themes of the party's programme, this was a heterogeneous party, a 'syndicat d'élus aux contours flous', as Delbreil describes it, marked by a large diversity of tendencies among its leading members, extending from the traditional right to a form of regionalist, Christian, democracy. The traditionalist approach was to be found in the *chanoine* Collin, the *abbé* Ritz, and Guy de Wendel. Sérot demonstrated a more 'liberal' approach. And a continuing influence from the German *Zentrum* could be detected in the *abbé* Hackspill, the *chanoine* Louis, and Louis Meyer. The decision to split from Alsatian 'Christian democrats' was helped along by the *chanoine* Collin, who heightened awareness of the 'contrastes des

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<sup>21</sup> Jean, Hackspill and de Maud'Huy were replaced in the 1924 URL general election lists by Edouard Moncelle, an engineer, the *abbé* Gaston Louis, and Théodore Paqué, the mayor of St Avold.



caractères et des intérêts alsaciens et lorrains', whilst Schuman talked of the 'tutelle de Strasbourg'.<sup>22</sup>

Needless to say, there were limitations to the URL's success, possibly the greatest of which was language.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Schuman, few among the party's leadership or its members were fluent in German, and therefore they were unable to extend the URL's success deep into the Germanophone sector of the region. Secondly, a series of factors during annexation had greatly reduced the indigenous population's ability to replenish its stock of politicians and prospective leaders. Under German rule, many *mosellan* families had sent their sons to France to join the French army, very few of whom returned after 1918. Although Roth shows that, by 1910, a new generation was finally coming of age and remaining in the region, a limited number of whom had benefited from the high quality university education offered in cities such as Strasbourg, Berlin, Bonn, and Munich, few had considered entering politics in order to confront German dominance in the region, preferring to work with, rather than against, the very powerful German regime. In fact, even by 1919, Schuman had not considered a career in politics, and it was only as a result of pressure from friends and acquaintances that he entered politics at the age of 33.<sup>24</sup> In any case, there were few alternatives, since German politicians had been systematically removed, many *mosellan* politicians from the German era had been discredited, and suitable *indigènes* were thin on the ground. Schuman, therefore, was a rare exception among a population that included various *notables* who had blotted their copy books before or

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<sup>22</sup> Delbriel, Jean-Claude, 'Les démocrates-crétiens en Lorraine dans l'entre-deux-guerres', in *Cahiers Lorrains*, 1987, No.4, pp.419-447.

<sup>23</sup> See Roth, *Les Lorrains entre la France et l'Allemagne* for an examination of continuity and discontinuity in the Moselle's *classe des notables*.

<sup>24</sup> Duvigneau, Marion, L'Hôte, Marie-Claude, Michaux, Laurette, *Robert Schuman, un Mosellan en politique*, Metz, 1994, p.9.

during the war, and were still considered at best, unreliable, and at worst, 'collaborators'.<sup>25</sup> Finally, of all the URL's representatives, many were descendants of *Mosellan émigrés*, including Sérot, Bompard, Stuhl, Hirschauer, and de Berthier.

Although most of these men had spent most, or all, of their lives outwith the Moselle, they still claimed to be *Mosellans de souche*, and were generally accepted as such.<sup>26</sup>

But it was not until after the Second World War that the Moselle was able to supply truly home-grown politicians, who provided representation for the region in Paris. It was weaknesses such as these, which, to a certain extent, account for the party's drop in support in favour of the parties of opposition, notably those on the left.

In the 1919 elections, the socialist party was the URL's main rival, although it had been slower to regroup in the face of the mass departure of Germans, who had made up much of the socialist following and leadership in the region. A branch of the German socialist party, the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) had first been set up in the Moselle in the 1890s, but had been rewarded with little support compared to Alsace. One reason for this had been the weakness of the trade union movement in the region. The socialist trade unions, in particular, had failed to recruit significant numbers, especially among the indigenous workforce. This was largely for

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<sup>25</sup> An interesting example is Alexis Weber. Before the war, he had worked as a banker in his home town of Boulay and had been its mayor from 1896 until 1908. He was arrested in August 1914 by the German authorities, accused of being a revanchist friend of Jean-Pierre Jean, the founder of the *Souvenir Français* (papers relating to the *Souvenir Français* were found in Weber's house following his arrest), and was imprisoned in the fort at Ehrenbrestein near Koblenz along with various other political suspects from the Moselle. However, by November 1914 he had managed to convince the Germans to allow him to return to his home town of Boulay in the Moselle region. Exactly how he managed this remarkable feat remains unclear. However, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France four years later caught Weber completely on the wrong foot, having reckoned on a German, not French, victory. Using possibly the same personal skills which had earned him his freedom from the Germans during the war, he set about re-establishing his status and credibility under the French administration, quickly finding a place for himself in the ranks of the URL, going on to sit on the *Conseil général de la Moselle* from 1919 until 1940. See Roth, *Les Lorrains entre la France et l'Allemagne*, chapter 5, pp.157-207.

<sup>26</sup> *Emigrés* and their descendants returning to the Moselle after 1918 in other professions and walks of life were, in fact, few and far between.



cultural reasons. The unions had been formed elsewhere in Germany, and their German or Alsatian leaders were unpopular among the *Mosellans*. Nonetheless, the election of Georges Weill as a socialist deputy for Metz, in the Reichstag in 1912, brought cries of 'Metz la rouge', even though success reflected more the quality of the candidate, rather than the extent of support for the SPD.<sup>27</sup>

Curiously, however, the French socialist movement encountered similar difficulties in recruiting support among the Moselle's electorate. Its socialist militants were all *Français de l'intérieur*, for whom the *indigènes* had as much patience as they had previously shown for Germans and Alsatians. So, whilst integration of the socialist movement into French politics should otherwise have been a relatively smooth process in view of the republican political system, its leadership was simply unpalatable to the electorate. Equally, the absence of a well structured trade union system *in situ* further hindered progress in spreading the word of French-style socialism. In the 1919 elections, the *Parti socialiste unifié* blamed war and poverty on capitalists, militarists, and clericals, and pleaded with the public not to listen to 'les sottes légendes de Révolution et de Bolchévisme. Nous ne sommes pas des bolchévistes...'.<sup>28</sup>

Communist influences, derived from the German Revolution of November 1918, and to a certain extent the Russian Revolution which had been witnessed by significant numbers of indigenous soldiers, also left their mark on the political scene in the Moselle.<sup>29</sup> The Communist Party in the region was organised under the title of Alsace-Lorraine until 1935, but its *mosellan* section was strong, led by local, working class leaders such as Emile Béron, a metal worker who had been fired by the de

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<sup>27</sup> Roth, *La vie politique*, p.28.

<sup>28</sup> See Livet and Cabourdin, *Les élections dans le département de la Moselle*.

<sup>29</sup> See Brasme, 'Le rapatriement des prisonniers', in *Bulletin de liaison de l'A.N.S.V.B.*, 1988, pp.140-147.

Wendels for his political activities, and Emile Frisch, a railway worker. The party was almost exclusively Germanophone, and maintained strong links with Germany until communism was destroyed under Hitler in the mid-1930s. Support was strongest around the industrial towns of Amnéville and Hagondange, and the centres for railway workers at Basse-Yutz and Montigny-lès-Metz. During the inter-war period in the Moselle's politics, the left wing, whilst somewhat heterogeneous, remained dominated by German culture and German influences.

In the 1919 elections, a third group of politicians formed the *Ligue Républicaine Française Lorraine*. The *Ligue* brought together an odd mixture of liberal democrats, radical socialists, and supporters of republicanism with left-wing tendencies. Their programme began, 'Electeurs lorrains! Vous n'êtes plus sujets de l'Allemagne: vous êtes des citoyens français...'.<sup>30</sup> Their overall policy was to see the immediate integration and assimilation of the Moselle region into France. As Printz shows, the party was born out of laic ambitions originating from outwith the region rather than from within, ambitions held by those disappointed by the URL list of candidates. The majority of the *Ligue*'s leadership were *Nancéiens*, known as 'les gens du duc', who believed that after 47 years of German occupation, the Moselle should be taken in hand by a greater, French Lorraine. Not surprisingly, such a programme produced little electoral success in the atmosphere of integration, and the party did not put forward a list in the following general elections of 1924.

In fact, the elections of 1924 saw three different groups present lists to oppose the URL, none of which had fought in the 1919 elections, and all of which were grouped under the heading Cartel des gauches. They included the *Entente des*

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<sup>30</sup>See Livet and Cabourdin, *Les élections dans le département de la Moselle*.



*gauches*, the communists, and the *Union Nationale Républicaine Démocratique*. The latter's list included the editor of the newspaper the *Metzer Freies Journal*, Victor Demange<sup>31</sup> as well as Jean-Pierre Jean who had left the URL. The main points of its programme indicated a desire to see decentralisation, and a simplification of the administrative structure in the region including 'Suppression d'un régime spécial aux 3 départements recouverts: les habitants de la Moselle égaux dans leurs droits et leurs obligations aux autres Français'.<sup>32</sup> The changes in the nature of the opposition to the URL point to the major differences between the elections of 1919, and the subsequent elections in 1924.

### *Voting patterns*

In the 1919 elections, the URL secured a place in the French Chamber for every candidate on its list, all with clear majorities. As table 9 shows on the next page, the party gained 64.2 per cent of the votes against 27.8 per cent by the socialists and a meagre 8 per cent by the *Ligue*. The result was immediately declared a victory for French patriotism, putting paid, once and for all, to calls for a plebiscite. The term 'euphoria' was used to describe the atmosphere in which 'the population' (or a fifth of it) had voted. However, the elections had gone in favour of a party whose programme

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<sup>31</sup> According to a brief biography of Demange, held in the *Archives nationales* in Paris written 19 April 1924, 'il engagea une violente campagne et une charge à fond contre tout ce qui était français et venant de France. Il a lutté longtemps pour le maintien de la langue allemande, campagne connue sous le titre de 'défense de la Muttersprache'; les Français de l'intérieur, surtout les fonctionnaires... le régime français etc.(sic.)' Demange supposedly encouraged strikes in September 1919, 'émettant des idées et sentiments révolutionnaires, tant dans son journal que dans les réunions.' Thereafter, according to the document, he ceased his attacks and lived in some degree of comfort. 'On est seulement étonné de lui voir mener actuellement un train de vie somptueuse qui dénote une situation d'aisance et de fortune qu'on ne lui connaissait pas avant.' The French regime never liked Demange. Indeed, his newspaper, the *Metzer Freies Journal*, did not display the degree of patriotism towards France required by the French authorities following *désannexion*. The fact that the paper was in German condemned it from the start. In any case, it promoted an extreme form of *particularisme*, rather than a revolutionary, communist, or pro-German doctrine. CARAN, AJ/30/232.

<sup>32</sup> Livet and Cabourdin, *Les élections dans le département de la Moselle*.

illustrated certain key reservations about full integration into France, notably on questions of religion, language, and education, unlike the *Ligue* with its preference for immediate integration and assimilation. Surely a truly patriotic vote would have gone in favour of the *Ligue*? Likewise, had the euphoria not evaporated well before the elections, to be replaced within weeks of the signing of the armistice by a *malaise lorrain*, felt among large sections of the population?

**Table 9: Results of general elections, 16 November 1919, in the Moselle.**

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Percentage of total vote</i>
<i>Union Républicaine Lorraine</i>	64.2
<i>Parti Socialiste Unifié</i>	27.8
<i>Ligue Républicaine Lorraine Française</i>	8

In fact, the success of the URL can lead to two possible conclusions. Firstly, it could be said that the majority of voters accepted integration into France as either necessary or desirable, but only on certain levels. Acceptance of a France governed by a centralised, laic republic, for example, is less evident. Secondly, if the euphoria of a return to France had evaporated within weeks of November 1918, the sense of relief at being released from Germany’s wartime domination was sustained during the following months, and carried with it certain hopes and expectations. These were to be found in the URL’s election manifesto, which offered a future in which the region’s *indigènes* would no longer play second fiddle to ‘outsiders’, such as Germans, Alsatians, and *Français de l’intérieur*; protection for the region provided by her new sovereign against future threats of invasion by Germany; and respect for the promises made



during and immediately following the war by army generals and politicians, notably those concerning the safeguarding of local traditions, beliefs, and language.

The weakness of the *Ligue's* vote in the 1919 elections can clearly be put down to its failure to take a *particulariste* stance, as well as its intention to push for swift, if not brutal, assimilation with France. Those who voted for the *Ligue* undoubtedly included any newly arrived *Français de l'intérieur*, in particular Lorrainers arriving from the other three departments of the Lorraine region. What is far more significant, though, is the socialist vote, which was strongest in the *arrondissements* of Thionville-ouest (37.9 per cent), Sarreguemines (35.8 per cent), and Forbach (32.8 per cent). In the town of Thionville itself, the socialists gained 43.5 per cent of the vote, which produced the only instance where the URL was pushed into second place, with only 35.7 per cent of the vote. Clearly, the socialists were strongest in areas to the north of the linguistic frontier, whilst the populations of Thionville and Forbach all contained large numbers of industrial or mining workers. The socialist vote was weakest in Château-Salins, where it only reached 8.5 per cent. The Francophone, rural populations there had little need or sympathy for the left wing or the *Ligue*, giving instead a resounding victory to the URL. Equally, the socialists gained votes from the Protestant communities around the region, who could not entertain the idea of voting for the Catholic URL.

The backdrop for the socialist vote was the period of social unrest which had marked the region throughout 1919, in particular in the autumn of that year, when numerous strikes had affected industry, mining, and the railways.<sup>33</sup> The November vote reflected not so much a unity within the indigenous workforce in their struggle to

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<sup>33</sup> Printz, *La vallée usinière*, p.168.

gain favourable wage settlements and improved conditions, but rather a general sense of post-war *malaise* which was evident throughout France. Likewise, there was a heightened sense of awareness of communist revolutionary activity to be found in Europe as a whole, which may have worked for or against the socialists. As has been shown above, the trade union and socialist movements in the Moselle were anything but organised. And it has already been suggested that many among the electorate would have shied away from voting socialist because of the German origins of the movement. In the same vein, the socialists would have attracted a number of votes from Protestants and Jews, many of whom were Germanophone, and unlikely to vote for the staunchly Catholic URL.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, although the region contained a very high percentage of practising Catholics, there were undoubtedly those for whom the question of a local religious statute was of little personal interest. In this way, the URL, although the majority party in the region, was not the party of choice for every indigenous voter in 1919.

The 1924 elections followed four years of unsettled politics on a regional and national level. Economic crises, social unrest, taxation, criticism of the region's administration, reduction in the length of military service, and concerns regarding the crisis brewing in the Ruhr, were all issues addressed by political parties in the run up to the elections. Overall, though, the election was fought on the question; was the electorate for or against the *Bloc national*? Only the URL, representing the *Bloc*, had fought in the previous general election; all other parties were new to the electorate. There was a dramatic drop in the *particulariste* party's vote from 64.2 per cent to 50.8 per cent, as table 10 shows. Although all URL candidates won seats, they all did so by

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<sup>34</sup> See table 3, p.42.



the smallest of margins. The other three parties formed a largely left-wing opposition group under the title of the Cartel des gauches. What was most shocking, though, for supporters of the right-wing URL, aside from the loss of their massive majority, was the size of the communist vote which was larger than that of either the UNRD or the *Entente des gauches*. The communists gained 23.2 per cent of the overall vote, and 48.6 per cent of the left-wing vote. The geographical pattern of strength for the communists was similar to that of the socialists in the previous elections. The *arrondissements* of Thionville (33.1 per cent of the total vote), Sarreguemines (28.6 per cent), and Forbach (27.8 per cent) were where communist support was strongest. The railway workers of Montigny-lès-Metz helped to increase the success of the left wing parties in the *arrondissement* of Metz-Ville, to the detriment of the URL. And again, the left-wing vote was weakest in Château-Salins, where the URL won 69 per cent of the votes.

**Table 10: Results of general elections, 11 May 1924, in the Moselle.**

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Percentage of total vote</i>
<i>Union Républicaine Lorraine</i>	50.8
<i>Liste Communiste</i>	23.2
<i>Union Nationale Républicaine Démocratique</i>	17.8
<i>Entente des Gauches</i>	1.8

So, why did the URL lose so much support between 1919 and 1924 to the benefit of the left-wing parties? Firstly, the change in the actual number of votes cast in favour of the URL dropped between 1919 and 1924 by only 4,075 votes, or by 6.6 per cent. This was disappointing, in view of the increase in the size of the electorate,

an increase of roughly 20,000,<sup>35</sup> especially as many of those gaining the right to vote were *Français de l'intérieur*, who might have been persuaded to support the URL in the face of the threat posed by the communists.<sup>36</sup> However, several thousand of them were also German immigrants who had been successful in their bids for naturalisation. It is highly unlikely that many of these newly enfranchised voters would have favoured the URL, despite the fact that many of them were married to *indigènes*. As with the socialists in the 1919 elections, the communists appear to have gained support from the Protestant community, who were again motivated less by ideological reasons than by a dislike for the URL. But was the move away from the URL indicative of a move away from *particularisme*? In fact, only the *Entente des gauches* specifically rejected the idea of a religious statute for the region, promoting in its programme the introduction of the laic laws,<sup>37</sup> whilst the communists continued to support certain regional, versus national, issues, notably the linguistic question, whilst keeping quiet about religion.<sup>38</sup>

Undoubtedly, the URL lost votes between 1919 and 1924 to the UNRD. Jean-Pierre Jean, formerly an elected candidate of the URL, and Victor Demange, were among those on the latter's list who may have attracted former URL supporters. Upon reflection, such men might have possibly found the party too bourgeois, Francophone, right-wing. Both won the largest number of votes for the UNRD,

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<sup>35</sup> The electorate rose from 116,409 in 1919 to 137,701 in 1924. The number of votes cast rose from 96,971 in 1919 to 116,409 in 1924.

<sup>36</sup> Likewise, there was no equivalent to the *Ligue's* list presented in the 1924 elections which meant the choice for the *Français de l'intérieur* was fairly restricted.

<sup>37</sup> Printz, *La vallée usinière*, p.171.

<sup>38</sup> Particularly in Alsace, the communists lent their support to the autonomists. See Samuel Goodfellow, 'From Communism to Nazism', *JCH*, Vol. 27, no.2, pp.231-258, April 1992. Goodfellow suggests that Alsatian autonomists borrowed support for regional issues in the late 1920s from the communists before turning to the Nazis in the 1930s, producing a number of crudely named 'Beefsteak Nazis' - Nazis in brown uniforms who had once been red communists.



compared to others on the party's list. Demange's newspaper, the *Metzer Freies Journal*, which was branded by the new administration 'l'organe radical de Metz', survived the initial witch-hunt and enjoyed a wide readership among indigenous workers in Germanophone and industrial areas, as well as the suburbs of Metz.<sup>39</sup> The paper reflected Demange's awareness of the frustrations affecting his readers in the early 1920s, in the light of integration into France. The least successful party of the 1924 elections was the *Entente des gauches*, which polled 1.8 per cent of the votes, again following the geographical pattern of the socialists during the 1919 elections.

Whether or not the URL lost votes directly to the communists is not clear, and although it should not be ruled out, is unlikely. The fact that there was no Communist Party at the 1919 elections (the French *Parti Communiste* was formed at the end of 1920), distorts the picture somewhat. Likewise, the absence in 1924 of a specifically socialist party (of the type many had become accustomed to during annexation, in the form of the SPD) had its impact, drawing some hitherto socialist voters to support the communists.<sup>40</sup> This change might have made the communist vote appear more extremist than it actually was. The increasing organisation of workers followed the initial period of post-war disruption right up to the Congrès de Tours (which saw the split between socialists and communists) allowing better dissemination of propaganda. Additionally, the failure of the *Bloc national* to resolve social issues on a regional and national level, the representation of the *patronat* on the URL electoral lists (notably Guy de Wendel), might all have sent some voters in search of an alternative to the left

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<sup>39</sup> Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.214.

<sup>40</sup> This is the interpretation of the *commissaire spécial de Sarreguemines* in his report of 13 May 1924. CARAN, AJ/30/232. However, the opposite had been the case in 1919 when communists may have been forced to vote for the socialists in the absence of a communist list.

of the URL. However, the existence of protest voters does not automatically imply that the communists were the direct beneficiaries. What is undoubtedly clear is that the relative success of the communists in the 1924 elections sent a shock wave through the Moselle's Francophone middle classes. Concerns about integration into France, the suppression of the *commissariat général*, the intricacies of rebuilding departmental status in the Lorraine region as a whole, all paled in the face of the perceived revolutionary threat, which was seemingly confirmed by the election results. In fact, the communists were not as organised as a fearful bourgeoisie thought. Neither did the communists enjoy a stable following. And although they went on to see some electoral success in the general elections of 1928, when one of their candidates was elected to the Chamber, this had more to do with discontent with the administration of the region, as well as social issues, rather than ideological motivation.<sup>41</sup> The Moselle's communist movement remained, throughout the period, very German in character, which cramped its potential in terms of electoral and geographical success.<sup>42</sup>

Although the URL candidates managed to be re-elected in 1924, the Cartel des gauches successfully ousted the *Bloc national* in the rest of France, bringing to an end the *Union sacrée* and the *Chambre bleu horizon*. However, it was one of the consequences of the Cartel des gauches' electoral success which was to create the biggest moral and political crisis in the Moselle since integration itself.

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<sup>41</sup> Diwo, *Le communisme en Moselle*, p.136.

<sup>42</sup> Roth, *La vie politique*, p.138.



*The crisis of the laic laws*

Upon his becoming premier at the head of the Cartel des gauches, Herriot lost no time in setting out his plans for the returned provinces, and announced them in his ministerial declaration of 17 June 1924.

Le gouvernement est persuadé qu'il interprétera  
fidèlement le vœu des chères populations enfin rendues à  
la France, en hâtant la venue du jour où seront effacées  
les dernières différences de législation entre les  
départements recouverts et l'ensemble du territoire de la  
République. Dans cette vue, il réalisera la suppression  
du commissariat général et préparera les mesures qui  
permettront, en respectant les situations acquises, en  
ménageant les intérêts matériels et moraux de la  
population, d'introduire en Alsace et en Lorraine  
l'ensemble de la législation républicaine.<sup>43</sup>

According to Baechler, with the arrival in power of the Cartel des gauches and the announcement of the introduction of the laic laws in Alsace and Lorraine, 'les conditions politiques sont totalement transformées'.<sup>44</sup> Herriot's policy to tighten up the application of republican laic laws throughout France, as well as accelerating measures which had already been put in place by the outgoing *Bloc national* government, brought an immediate and noisy response, emanating from the returned provinces. They were concerned, above all else, about losing the concordatory

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Kieffer, *L'enseignement primaire mosellan*, p.75.

<sup>44</sup> Baechler, *Le parti catholique alsacien*, p.427.

regime.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the Moselle and Alsace, politicians, political leaders, and newspapers and publications expressed the depth of feeling among the populations. On 6 July 1924, a march was organised in Bitché to protest against the government's plans, and, on the same day, the women's branch of the Action Catholique Lorraine adopted a hostile stance to the introduction of laic laws in the region, stating they represented, 'une atteinte aux droits formels de Dieu et de l'Eglise'.<sup>46</sup>

According to Printz, in the Moselle, only the *Entente des gauches* (with 1.8 per cent of the total vote) had openly declared itself in favour of applying the laic laws.<sup>47</sup> Yet the Cartel des gauches leadership chose to interpret the May elections differently, believing that all those who had voted for the communists, the UNRD, as well as the *Entente* supported laicism. It is not clear whether this resulted from wishful thinking on the part of Herriot and his government, or ineptitude. Had the electorate been aware of the imminent danger to their religious statute, the URL might not have seen quite so many protest votes drift away in favour of the other parties.

It is thanks to Robert Schuman that a much clearer picture emerges of the extent of feeling in the aftermath of Herriot's announcement. A practising Catholic, Schuman, acting as the spokesperson for the 21 elected *Mosellan* and Alsatian deputies, called for a referendum to be held in the provinces which would establish whether individuals were for or against the introduction of French republican legislation. At first glance, what is surprising about this referendum is that women were allowed to participate. However, Schuman and the architects of this public consultation were entirely aware of the strength of feeling to be found among women on the subject of religion, and the results of the exercise were to bear this out. In the

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<sup>45</sup> Becker and Berstein, *Victoire et Frustrations*, p.262.

<sup>46</sup> Kieffer, *L'enseignement primaire mosellan*, p.76.



end, the referendum took the form of a petition signed by 196,726 signatories in the Moselle, among them 88,726 men and 108,000 women.<sup>48</sup> In the two Alsatian departments, a similar pattern emerged.<sup>49</sup> The response was clearly enthusiastic, although it is disappointing that there are no details concerning how the signatures were gathered, or the geographical distribution of the signatories.

Despite the impressive number of signatures on Schuman's petition, Alapetite suggested in a report to the French Prime Minister that, 'd'une façon générale, l'agitation est plus vive en Alsace qu'en Lorraine, et plus active dans les campagnes que dans les grandes villes.'<sup>50</sup> Likewise, according to an extract from the Strasbourg despatch sent to the British Foreign Office on July 1924, its author believed the Moselle's representatives such as the Bishop of Metz, Mgr Pelt, to be 'less energetic' with regard to the protest against the introduction of laic laws.<sup>51</sup> The report continued, 'the clerical journal *Le Lorrain*, (June 27th) begins an article with the words: "En Alsace, le projet tendant à introduire les lois laïques dans les trois départements recouvrés, soulève de véhémentes protestations" - as if Lorraine were less perturbed'. Clearly, the imminent suppression of the *commissariat général* which was envisaged alongside the introduction of the laic laws, and which would separate the Moselle from Alsace once and for all, acted as a form of compensation for some who were less concerned about religion. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the Moselle's population was any less intractable on the subject of the local religious statute than the Alsatian population. If, as a later report sent to the British

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<sup>47</sup> Printz, *La vallée usinière*, p.171.

<sup>48</sup> Defensor (abbé Nicolay), *Elsaß-Lothringen im Kampfe um seine religiösen Einrichtungen*, (Schwerdorff, 1926), p.28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. In Bas-Rhin, 81,619 men and 99,993 women signed. In Haut-Rhin, 83,502 men and 108,201 women.

<sup>50</sup> CARAN, AJ/30/207. Report of 11 July 1924.

<sup>51</sup> PRO, FO 371/10545. Report from Lord Crewe, 9 July 1924.

Foreign Office suggests, neither Protestants nor Jews in the provinces shared the Catholic community's determination to save the *concordat*,<sup>52</sup> then this puts both Alapetite's and the Strasbourg despatch's assumptions in a different light as the Moselle region contained a much higher proportion of Catholics in its population (92.4 per cent) compared to the Haut-Rhin (86 per cent), and the Bas-Rhin (61.9 per cent).<sup>53</sup> Equally, Schuman's efforts on behalf of the URL, as well as the three departments' elected deputies, indicate that the Moselle's politicians were, if anything, more involved in protecting the special religious statute of the provinces, than their Alsatian counterparts.

Clearly, common interests between the Moselle and Alsace did not produce a united front. For example, according to Kieffer, when, on 16 March 1925, Alsatian Catholics succeeded in organising, with minimal success, a strike in the region's schools, 'la Moselle ne bougea pas'.<sup>54</sup> Kieffer goes on to describe how members of the URL, in their participation in the protest movement against the introduction of laic laws, 'gardèrent tout au long de la crise une attitude de fermeté courtoise vis-à-vis du gouvernement Herriot'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the manner of involvement of the URL deputies in the protest movement was not always to the satisfaction of all sections of society, and the mayor of Sarreguemines, Henri Nominé, was an example of one in favour of more extreme action. The Moselle's elected and religious leaders may indeed have appeared less aggressive in their efforts to defend the local religious statute. However, whether due to their collective efforts, or to a fervour claimed to be entirely Alsatian, the

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<sup>52</sup> PRO, FO 371/10545. Report from Lord Crewe, 11 September 1924. In 1926 Protestants made up 4.8 percent of the population and Jews 1.1 percent.

<sup>53</sup> Although such statistics do not indicate the numbers of Catholics who actually practiced their religion, the general evidence suggests that such a figure would have been extremely high in the Moselle.

<sup>54</sup> Kieffer, p.77.

<sup>55</sup> Kieffer, p.78.



introduction of laic laws to the Moselle and Alsace was abandoned, followed by the fall of the Herriot government, and the announcement by Painlevé on 21 April 1925, 'l'assimilation législative ne saurait être poursuivie qu'entourée de tous les conseils qualifiés, dans le respect des droits acquis, dans le souci d'entente générale et d'unité nationale'. And a year after the first protest marches began against Herriot's government, a crowd of 12,000 assembled at a school in Metz to mark the anniversary.<sup>56</sup> Overall, though, the difference of approach between the Moselle and Alsace is indicative of a far wider difference of opinion, which was to dominate the regions' politics for the remainder of the 1920s, and was to manifest itself in the form of the autonomist movement.

### *Autonomisme versus particularisme*

The origins of the Alsatian and *mosellan* autonomy movement are to be found in the period of annexation, when, out of the politics of *protestation* (the protest movement which opposed the initial annexation by Germany of the provinces in 1871), a desire for an increase in power over the regions' affairs was born among indigenous Alsatians and *Mosellans*. Before the war, an Alsatian called René Ley, a member of a group of Alsace-Lorrainer autonomists, was arrested and imprisoned by the Germans for expressing his autonomist sentiments. However, following the war, he was equally unpopular with the French administration. For France and Germany alike, autonomism of the kind adhered to by Ley, was regarded as dangerous, anti-nationalistic, and unpatriotic. The autonomist movement was, in fact, the product of the extremely nationalist approach of these two countries. Ley's proposed programme, which was

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<sup>56</sup> Kieffer, p.79. Kieffer points out that the administration's own *commissaire spécial* estimated the crowd to contain only 6,000. It was his duty, after all, to play down any continuing action against the

set out in an article in a Swiss newspaper and translated by the British Foreign Office, included the following points: no French officials in Alsace-Lorraine; a clear distinction between citizenship of France and of Alsace-Lorraine; no military service in the French army, and the creation of a militia in Alsace-Lorraine; an independent government in Strasbourg, and an ambassador in Paris and a Governor selected from the indigenous population.<sup>57</sup> Ley's programme was undoubtedly at the extreme end of the autonomist scale. Other, more moderate autonomists, were willing to remain part of the French nation, whilst accepting a high degree of regional autonomy.

Although Ley's programme made no mention of the role of Germany in an independent Alsace-Lorraine, few underestimated the extent of financial support Germany was lending, if not to Ley and his compatriots, then to other autonomists in Alsace, such as the banker Emile Pinck (brother of *abbé* Louis Pinck of Hambach), Jean Keppi, as well as the *abbé* Xavier Haegy.<sup>58</sup> Germany was willing to support any political movement which could weaken the French grip on the provinces. The boot was on the other foot, and *revanchism* was now to be found in Germany, not France.<sup>59</sup> However, funds which were sent to Alsatian autonomists have been hard to trace back to the German government itself.

The Moselle's autonomist movement was almost exclusively dependent on Alsatians for support, initiative, and money.<sup>60</sup> Yet there was little contact between the

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introduction of the laic laws.

<sup>57</sup> PRO, FO 371/3748. Memorandum of 10 May 1919.

<sup>58</sup> See Baechler, *Le parti catholique alsacien*, pp.591-594, for an indepth biography of this moderate autonomist.

<sup>59</sup> Many regard the *Wissenschaftliches Institut der Elsaß-Lothringer im Reich*, based in Frankfurt, as the nerve centre of German revanchism where academics and former civil servants of Alsace and the Moselle prepared and published studies illustrating Germany's right to sovereignty of the provinces, for example, Georg Wolfram, *Das Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen 1871-1918*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1931-1938, four volumes.

<sup>60</sup> Metzger, 'Relations entre autonomistes lorrains et alsaciens', in *Actes du 103e Congrès Nationale des Sociétés Savantes Nancy-Metz*, Paris, 1979, pp.155-170. See also Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.179.



leaders of the movement in Strasbourg, and those struggling to build up support in the Moselle. The example of Jean Dumser, one of the few, prominent *Mosellan* autonomists originally from the *Pays Bitche*, bears this out. In his memoirs, he described how, when he approached the *abbé* Haegy in order to offer his support to the Alsatian movement, he was told, 'Avec cela, vous êtes Lorrain et ici il faut que nous prenions avant tout les nôtres'.<sup>61</sup> The Alsatian autonomist movement had always functioned under the title of 'Alsace-Lorraine', thereby including the Moselle region in all its endeavours and proposals for regional independence or separation. Yet, in view of the weakness of support in the Moselle, it is not clear why they did this. Dumser, who went on to form the *Lothringer Volksbund* in Metz and bought the newspaper *Le Sarregueminois* as a propaganda tool, used funds traced back to the Alsatian autonomists.<sup>62</sup> However, according to Metzger, most of Dumser's projects failed due to the inertia and indifference of the *Mosellans*, as well as the successful counter-propaganda of the government, and the Francophile population and its representatives.

Whilst Herriot's efforts in the region led to the downfall of his government, they also gave a boost to support for the autonomists in both Alsace and the Moselle, and the publication of the *Heimatbund* manifesto in 1926 was a key moment in the autonomist movement. The manifesto was deeply critical of the French for their broken promises, and particularly their failure to treat the returned provinces with respect. It was signed by a total of 75 Alsations from the Bas-Rhin and the Haut-Rhin, and 27 *Mosellans*, a significant achievement in view of Dumser's failures in the preceding years. However, whilst this event took the Alsatian movement from

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Metzger, 'Relations entre autonomistes lorrains et alsaciens', in *Actes du 103e Congrès Nationale des Sociétés Savantes Nancy-Metz*, Paris, 1979, pp.155-170. See also Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.162.

<sup>62</sup> Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.179.

strength to strength, leading to well publicised clashes with the government in the late 1920s, the movement in the Moselle ran out of steam, leaving a few 'hot spots' in Germanophone areas around Forbach, Sarreguemines, Sarrebourg, Bitche, and, to a lesser extent, Thionville. Support was strongest among the rural middle classes in these areas. This support illustrates the concerns of the Germanophone populations compared to that of Francophone populations who were happier with the status quo. Middle class support can almost certainly be put down to the feeling that opportunities had been lost as a result of the French administration's linguistic policy in the region. Equally, the economic drawbacks of integration may have hit hardest in these areas. Even before the *Heimatbund* manifesto had been published, the *particulariste* URL had distanced itself from the autonomist movement, its members voting for a motion in October 1925 against autonomism, deeming it unpatriotic, anti-nationalist, and unconstitutional.<sup>63</sup>

The evidence presented here suggests that the autonomist movement in the Moselle was largely unsuccessful due to a lack of leadership, unity, and popular support. However, this lack of success was not for want of a sense of grievance. For example, in 1922, a school teacher of French origin working in the small village of Schweyen near Sarreguemines neglected to teach religion to his class. He was physically attacked by three local inhabitants, including the priest.<sup>64</sup> The failure of autonomism to develop significantly in the Moselle, though, stemmed from a variety of factors, including a distrust of Alsace<sup>65</sup>, a total lack of support for the movement

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<sup>63</sup> Delbriel, 'Les démocrates-crétiens en Lorraine', in *Les Cahiers Lorrain*, No.4 December 1987, pp.419-447, p.442.

<sup>64</sup> Metzger, 'Relations entre autonomistes lorrains et alsaciens', in *Actes du 103e Congrès Nationale des Sociétés Savantes Nancy-Metz*, Paris, 1979, pp.155-170. See also Roth, *Le temps des journaux*, p.158.

<sup>65</sup> It is not surprising that support for the autonomist movement was strongest in the areas surrounding Sarreguemines, Bitche, and Sarrebourg, in other words, the areas closest to *Alsace*



among the Francophone populations, and, according to Roth, a slower cultural and social evolution of the region.<sup>66</sup> Just as important in repelling *Mosellans* from the movement, though, was its German influence. In the same way as the 'taint' of German origins on the socialist and trade union movement before the war were responsible for their failure to win popular support in the Moselle, the autonomists, for the same reasons, were hindered in their efforts to win widespread popularity. As long as autonomism implied even a hint of a return to German sovereignty, such as the use of the title Alsace-Lorraine, Elsaß-Lothringen implied, the majority of the Moselle's population would reject it out of hand. Why, though, was the same not the case in Alsace? Surely Alsace had also suffered at the hands of the Germans? Again, the contrasting experience of annexation, especially with regard to movements of population, as well as the greater cultural affinity of the Alsatian people to Germany, played their part in dictating attitudes towards the former sovereign. Although the Germanophone populations of the Moselle had not suffered the humiliation of linguistic and cultural oppression to the same extent as the Francophone populations, they had still become third class citizens, ranking below Germans and Alsatians, and so the same animosity had developed as a result. A closing of ranks occurred among the Moselle's population in the aftermath of *désannexion*, which largely shut out Germans and Alsatians, as well as *Français de l'intérieur* and fellow Lorrainers, from the three other departments of the region, as the formation of political parties in 1919 shows. There was little chance, therefore, that an Alsatian autonomist movement, which purported to defend the rights of 'Lorraine' or Lothringen, would ever gain

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*bossue*, the northern tip of the Bas-Rhin. Here, many (though not all) Germanophone *Mosellans* had far more in common with Alsatians than with *Messins* or Francophone *Mosellans*. Equally, in these areas, the *particulariste* URL vote was weakest whilst left-wing parties enjoyed relative success.

<sup>66</sup> Presumably Roth is referring to the Moselle's slowness to overcome linguistic and cultural inconsistencies in the region and to create a distinctly *mosellan* identity.

widespread support in the Moselle. The movement implied too obviously a reassertion of Alsatian hegemony. The desire to escape the smothering effect of Alsatian, as well as German, culture, was far greater than the desire to see regional autonomy granted to the provinces. In any case, from the earliest stages of integration into France, *Mosellans* had believed the future success of their economy lay with France, not Germany.

However, there is evidence that many individuals in the Moselle found certain aspects of autonomism appealing - such as the chance to retain control over issues of regional importance, and the curbing of decision-making from the national 'centre' - even if this did not translate into open support for the movement. Well-respected and trusted figures, who adhered to autonomist politics, often attracted, through the power of their position and personality, support from the communities around them, for example, mayors, *notables*, and clergymen such as the *abbé* Louis Pinck, who was as much for autonomism as he was for the protection of local traditions and culture, something which can be seen through his work as a renowned folklorist. In fact, in place of *autonomisme*, *particularisme* developed as the necessary *mosellan* defence, not simply against France, but against the dominance of Alsace in purely *mosellan* affairs.

In the Moselle, *particularisme* evolved to the extent that those political parties which did not openly subscribe to it, such as the *Ligue* and the *Entente des gauches*, experienced electoral disasters. *Particularisme* can be traced back to the 1870s when a candidate for elections to the regional council defined his idea of an 'élu local lorrain'



as an 'indigène' of the region, who should not 'subir l'humiliation d'être représenté par un étranger'.<sup>67</sup> Autonomism was born of the very same sentiment, it differed only from *particulariste* politics in the solutions it sought to the problem. The URL, the party of *particularisme* in the post-war period, sought a middle road between total domination by, and separation from, the national government. It sought to protect the region's fragile identity, and with it the traditions of the population, whilst, as the autonomists would see it, collaborating with the enemy in other areas: for example, the suppression of the *commissariat général*. *Particulariste* politics, therefore, were not such a distant relative of autonomist politics. Indeed, *particularistes* sought regional autonomy with regard to certain key issues: religion, education, language, and, to a lesser extent, social legislation. Assimilation with France on all other levels was acceptable, either out of necessity or patriotism. Which of these factors applied, depended upon the sentiments of the individual. To say that *particularisme* in the Moselle was a milder, less enthusiastic, political movement is firstly, to underestimate the depth of feeling among the Moselle's *particularistes*, and secondly, to overestimate the support for autonomism in Alsace. In any case, *particularisme* was almost entirely successful. Autonomism was not.

### *Concluding remarks*

The extent to which the *malaise lorrain* dictated the pace of post-war politics in the Moselle can clearly be seen in the success of *particulariste* politics. The URL stood for the kind of regionalism which brought broad support from the region's admittedly small electorate. Equally, those parties which gained from the drop in URL support between 1919 and 1924, notably the communists, were obliged to take up regional

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<sup>67</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, pp.180-182.

issues associated with the *malaise*, issues concerning language, education, religion, and local legislation, in order to make progress. Of similar importance in the Moselle's inter-war politics, was the continued distancing of the region from its neighbour Alsace. The creation of strictly *mosellan* parties, as well as the cool reception awarded to the Alsatian based autonomist movement, are all indicative of the indigenous population's desire to shake off the *joug alsacien*, make a fresh start, and fight its own battles in the French context. That fresh start was possible in some respects due to the mass clear-out of Germans, and German 'collaborators', from the Moselle's administration and politics, making way for the likes of Robert Schuman, whose glorious career in European politics had its humble beginnings in Thionville-Est in 1919. The arrival of *émigrés* and their descendants in politics was viewed largely as inevitable, because of the need for a new French hierarchy. Yet there were some threads of continuity in the region's political arena, though perhaps not as many as can be found in Alsace during the same period. Ultimately, though, the politics of the Moselle featured a certain pragmatism, an attitude which was not so evident amongst its more excitable neighbours in Alsace.



### *Summary*

In 1919, the size of the Moselle's electorate, as a proportion of the total adult population, was remarkably small. It was greatly reduced by the exclusion of all German immigrants and foreigners in the region, but also by the continuing disenfranchisement of women, as in France as a whole. Election results, therefore, as a means of establishing sentiment or 'public opinion', must be used with caution. The first elections, in November 1919, were hailed as a 'plebiscite' in favour of French sovereignty. However, voters did not elect the party of assimilation, the *Ligue Républicaine Lorraine Française*. Instead, they voted in large numbers for the *Union Républicaine Lorraine* (URL), a party which took a *particulariste* stance on issues concerning language, religion, education, and social legislation, but was assimilationist on all other levels. In the following elections, support for the URL slipped in favour of a new set of opposition parties on the left, in particular, the communist list. The success of the left in 1924 can be put down to a general sense of disillusionment with the *Bloc national*, to which the URL deputies had allied themselves, and to social and economic dissatisfaction as a result of regional and national factors, rather than to widespread ideological support for the communists. The announcement by the Cartel des gauches of the introduction of republican legislation in the returned provinces and the application of the laic laws resulted in an outcry from the regions. The overwhelming rejection of Herriot's plans in the Moselle, and elsewhere, forced him to back down and ultimately brought the downfall of the Cartel des gauches government. The crisis strengthened *particulariste* sentiment in the Moselle and briefly caused an upturn in interest in autonomism. However, overall, the Alsatian and German origins of the movement were responsible for the broad rejection of autonomism in the Moselle region throughout the inter-war period.

## Conclusion

The centre of Metz today still retains traces of the dramatic historical events which unfolded at the end of the First World War. The clean-shaven statue of St Daniel still looks down upon visitors entering the Cathédrale St Etienne. Further along the cathedral wall is the plaque, celebrating Foch's delight on 26 November 1918 at seeing French troops enter the Place d'Armes, where only days before the revolutionaries had triumphantly flown the red flag from the Hôtel de ville. A short walk through the now pedestrian streets, where K and her companions witnessed the looting of German owned shops and stores, is the 'German quarter'. These streets, whose construction began under German architects, and was completed in the inter-war period by their French replacements, lead to Avenue Maréchal Foch, once Kaiser Wilhelm-Ring. From there, the station can be reached, its imposing structure symbolic of the German desire to impose German culture and identity on the region and its indigenous population. It was from this station that the majority of the region's German *expulsés* and *rapatriés* departed once French *épuration* procedures had begun, many of them returning twenty years later as the second German annexation gripped the region.

From Metz station today, the historian, curious to follow up the inter-war history of the Moselle, could choose a number of different destinations. Towards Thionville to the north, in the industrial and mining valleys, Baudin's 'gigantisme' no longer reigns, although the landscape still bears the scars. To the east of the Moselle towards St Avold, Sarreguemines, and Bitche, the use of local dialects has survived, despite the best efforts of the *méthode directe*. To the south east, Alsace is reached through the Vosges mountains where a milder form of the inter-war antagonism



between *Mosellans* and Alsatians can still be detected. Likewise, a journey into the Meurthe-et-Moselle and to Nancy further illustrates how such long-standing rivalries survive through the generations. The struggle for the title of *capitale de l'est* has undoubtedly been won by Strasbourg, which now houses the Council of Europe. However, Metz has gained the title of administrative capital of Lorraine with the Hôtel de région, nestled among the city's other municipal buildings. Finally, the historian could choose to travel west, to Paris, along the railway line which, in 1931, first linked the Gare de l'Est directly to the 'German' station in Metz. Relations with Paris and *la mère patrie* are now strong. Yet, the local statute, defined in the 1920s, lives on, more or less intact, into the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Moselle and its people still insist it is the rest of France which should fall in line with their Bismarckian social legislation, not vice versa.

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This thesis was started with the idea of working on the history of both Alsace and the Moselle in the inter-war period. When it became evident that much of the existing literature was, in practice, focused on Alsace and that the particularities of the history of the Moselle in this period had not been adequately analysed, the Moselle became the principal subject for investigation. The research presented above has sought to demonstrate, mainly from primary sources, the distinctive nature of the region's experience. Indeed, some of the history is paralleled in Alsace, but, upon closer examination, much is found to be different. From this, therefore, a number of conclusions and findings can be identified.

It is clear the *malaise lorrain* resulted from a number of diverse causes: often the periphery was eclipsed by the immediate needs of the centre; leadership was

problematic, as can be seen in Mirman's tactlessness and in the premature departure of Millerand; and the methods of *francisation* succeeded in alienating many members of the indigenous population, rather than creating a sense of belonging within *la mère patrie*. If the *malaise* was at all inevitable, it was because of heightened expectations on both sides. French public opinion expected to find an essentially French population in the 'liberated' provinces. In return, *indigènes* expected tolerance and acceptance of their *particularismes* from French public opinion. In the end, the French government succeeded in satisfying neither.

The extent to which a chasm opened up between the rhetoric of both German and French nationalisms and the everyday reality of individuals' lives, is much in evidence. National identity is seen here at its most rigid in the minds of politicians, military personnel, and civil servants, but also at its most flexible, in the minds of individuals and in the context of their daily lives. In 1918, according to French policy, turning *Mosellans* into Frenchmen and women, could be achieved abruptly upon the application of *francisation*. Yet, the French were subscribing to a definition of identity which Eugen Weber describes as 'rigid, hence too brittle'.<sup>1</sup> Reality showed how selective individuals were as they accepted certain symbols of French patriotism and nationalism (the victory parades, the celebratory marches, the *tricolore* propaganda) and rejected others (the application of French republican legislation, most notably the laic laws, and the introduction of the French language).

Ultimately, there was no 'grand scheme' for the integration of the Moselle into France. Contrary to the impression created by the impressive array of wartime committees, conferences, and study groups, French administrators, just like their

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, Eugen, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, London, 1979, p.113.



superiors in Paris, were, quite literally, obliged to make things up as they went along. They responded to immediate crises and broadly ignored the carefully considered conclusions of the likes of the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine*. Successive governments all shared the same aim in the returned provinces. They all wished to see the complete assimilation of the Moselle and Alsace into *la mère patrie*. It was only in their muddled efforts to achieve this that they differed.

In the 1920s, the Moselle had to be reassembled after the second demographic rupture in fifty years. It literally had to be 'put back together again' as *épuration* swept out the region's professional, administrative, and political *notables*, most of whom were German. The extent to which this process brought about a break in continuity was greater for the Moselle than it was for Alsace as the movements of population were more significant for the former. This was partially rectified by the arrival of replacements from the French interior, including the so-called *Français de l'intérieur*, but also a limited number of *émigrés* and their descendants. There were also those who, although initially regarded with suspicion by the new authorities because of their dealings with the outgoing German administration, succeeded in re-establishing themselves in the revised circumstances. Alexis Weber was one of many who fell into this category.

The final, and perhaps most disturbing finding is the scope and character of the *francisation* policy. I have hesitated to use the term ethnic cleansing, yet the documentation from the period clearly refers to *épuration* and to the sweeping measures employed to bring about the removal of all ethnic Germans from the province. The delicacy and sensitivity of this issue is largely responsible for the absence of any kind of serious, public debate. However, as a foreigner in the region, unconnected to either French or German versions of events, it has been possible for me

to explore this issue, as well as the whole topic of integration, from a non-partisan perspective. This 'vue de l'étranger', coupled with access to private documents and material pertaining to the lives of one family and one community, will hopefully provide the starting point for a debate on the inter-war history of the Moselle. This debate is now long overdue.



## Appendix I

*Selection of place names in the Moselle with French and German equivalents in Germanophone sector:*

<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>
Amnéville	Stahlheim <sup>1</sup>
Boulay	Bolchen
Hagondange	Hagendingen
Hambach	Waldhambach
Knutange	Kneuttingen
Sarreguemines	Saargemünd
Thionville	Diedenhofen

*Selection of place names in the Moselle with French and German equivalents in Francophone sector from September 1914:<sup>2</sup>*

Jouy-aux-Arches	Gaudach
Scy	Sigach
Coin-lès-Cuvry	Kubernach

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<sup>1</sup> Stahlheim, an industrial town to the north of Metz, had not existed before annexation and emerged as a result of industrial development. Upon the region's return to France in 1918, the French named it Amnéville.

<sup>2</sup> Roth, *La Lorraine annexée*, p.604.

## Appendix II

### The Treaty of Versailles

28 June 1919

#### *ANNEX. to ARTICLE 79*

1. As from November 11, 1918, the following persons are ipso facto reinstated in French nationality:

- (1) Persons who lost French nationality by the application of the Franco-German Treaty of May 10, 1871, and who have not since that date acquired any nationality other than German;
- (2) The legitimate or natural descendants of the persons referred to in the immediately preceding paragraph, with the exception of those whose ascendants in the paternal line include a German who migrated into Alsace-Lorraine after July 15, 1870;
- (3) All persons born in Alsace-Lorraine of unknown parents, or whose nationality is unknown.

2. Within the period of one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty, persons included in any of the following categories may claim French nationality:

- (1) All persons not restored to French nationality under paragraph 1 above, whose ascendants include a Frenchman or Frenchwoman who lost French nationality under the conditions referred to in the said paragraph;
- (2) All foreigners, not nationals of a German State, who acquired the status of a citizen of Alsace-Lorraine before August 3, 1914;
- (3) All Germans domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine, if they have been so domiciled since a date previous to July 15, 1870, or if one of their ascendants was at that date domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine;
- (4) All Germans born or domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine who have served in the Allied or Associated armies during the present war, and their descendants;
- (5) All persons born in Alsace-Lorraine before May 10, 1871, of foreign parents, and the descendants of such persons;



(6) The husband or wife of any person whose French nationality may have been restored under paragraph 1, or who may have claimed and obtained French nationality in accordance with the preceding provisions.

The legal representative of a minor may exercise, on behalf of that minor, the right to claim French nationality; and if that right has not been exercised, the minor may claim French nationality within the year following his majority.

Except in the cases provided for in No.(6) or the present paragraph, the French authorities reserve to themselves the right, in individual cases, to reject the claim to French nationality.

3. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 2, Germans born or domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine shall not acquire French nationality by reason of the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France, even though they may have the status of citizens of Alsace-Lorraine.

They may acquire French nationality only by naturalisation, on condition of having been domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine from a date previous to August 3, 1914, and of submitting proof of unbroken residence within the restored territory for a period of three years from November 11, 1918.

France will be solely responsible for their diplomatic and consular protection from the date of their application for French naturalisation.

The French Government shall determine the procedure by which reinstatement in French nationality as of right shall be effected, and the conditions under which decisions shall be given upon claims to such nationality and applications for naturalisation, as provided by the present Annex.

## Appendix III

*Patriotic songs recited in schools and at celebrations by Francophone indigènes in the Moselle. (From documents given to the author by K's sister, G)*

### ‘Qui a gagné la guerre?’

Words by Ch. L. Pothier

C'est une question qui devient  
populaire

On entend partout sur des tons  
différents:

“Quel est donc celui qui gagna cette  
guerre

Dont le monde entier souffrait depuis  
longtemps?”

Les uns disent c'est l'Amérique

Aublocus, dit l'autre va l'honneur

Moi je réponds: “Cessez vos  
polémiques

Car le vrai, le seul et grand vainqueur:

C'est le Poilu soldat de France

Qui, sans peur, marchait au combat

Bravant la lutte et la souffrance

Le Poilu était toujours là!

Le sac au dos,

Couvert de terre

Lui, c'est lui qui fit nos succès

C'est lui qui l'a gagnée la guerre

Le Poilu le soldat français!”

Le civil s'crie: “J'ai tenu j'imagine

En faisant la queue au tabac, au  
charbon

Le sucre a manqué

J'ai bu d'la saccharine

J'ai gagné la guerre avec mes  
privations.”

Du tout, dit une jolie marraine

C'est l'amour qui fit tenir jusqu'au  
bout

Taisez-vous, clame un vieux capitaine,

De tout temps qui donna le grand  
coup?

*Refrain.*

C'est à l'ouvrier que r'vient toute la  
gloire

Hurle un mécano de munitions

L'député répond “J'ai forcé la victoire

Faisant des discours, votant des  
restrictions

Partout on glorifie le Tigre

Et Wilson, Foch, Pétain et Gouraud

Tous ces grands-là faut pas qu'on les  
dénigre

Et pourtant, le glorieux le plus beau...



# **‘C’est un oiseau qui vient de France’**

Words by C. Soubise

Sung to music by F. Boissière

Written 1875 and published in Paris

Un matin du printemps dernier,  
 Dans une bourgade lointaine,  
 Un petit oiseau printanier  
 Vint montrer son aile d’ébène.  
 Un enfant aux yeux jolis bleus  
 Aperçut la brune hirondelle.  
 Et connaissant l’oiseau fidèle,  
 Le salua d’un air joyeux!

Tous les matins et tous les soirs.  
 Epiant son retour peut-être,  
 Une fillette au rubans noirs  
 Apparaissait à sa fenêtre.  
 L’oiseau charmant vint s’y poser,  
 En dépit des soldats en armes,  
 Et l’enfant essuyant ses larmes  
 Mit sur son aile un long baiser!

*Au refrain*

Les coeurs palpitaient d’espérance,  
 Et l’enfant disait aux soldats:  
 Sentinelles, ne tirez pas,  
 C’est un oiseau qui vient de la France!

Il venait de la plaine en fleurs,  
 Et tous les yeux suivaient sa trace,  
 Car il portait nos trois couleurs  
 Qui flottaient gaiment dans l’espace.  
 Mais un soldat vise et fait feu...  
 Un long cri part, et l’hirondelle  
 Tout à coup refermant son aile,  
 Tombe expirante du ciel bleu!

La messagère du printemps  
 Se reposait de son voyage,  
 Quand un vieillard aux cheveux blancs  
 Vint à passer par le village.  
 Un cri joyeux poussé l’air  
 Lui fit soudain lever la tête,  
 Et comme aux anciens jours de fête  
 Son oeil brilla d’un regard fier!

Il fait au coeur une espérance,  
 Rayon divin qui ne meurt pas,  
 Mais l’oiseau qui chantait là-bas  
 Ne verra plus le ciel de France!

*Au refrain*

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